THE WOODEN HAND

THE BANTHORE PUBLIC LIBRARY
No. 15/15
Date 13/5
SERAMPORE INDIA

A DETECTIVE STORY

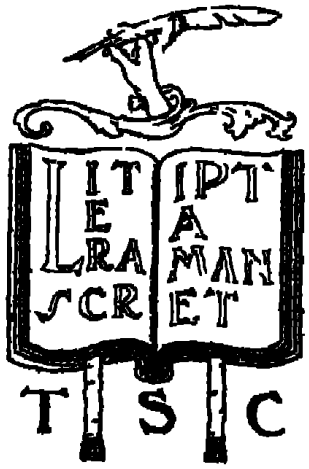
83 HF-6
4-14
B/600

BY

FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," "THE GUILTY HOUSE," "THE SILVER BULLET,"
"THE LONELY CHURCH," "THE WHITE ROOM," ETC.



LONDON
T. SEALEY CLARK
1 RACQUET COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.
1906

THE SANTIPORE PUBLIC LIBRARY
No 4315
Date
SANTIPORE, NADIA

THE WOODEN HAND

CHAPTER I

MISERY CASTLE

"Well, Miss Eva, I 'spose your pa will come home to spile things as he allays have done It ain't no wonder, I sez, as you sits moping by the winder, looking double your age, and you only twenty, as has no right to look forty, whatever you may say, though I took my dying alfred-david on its blessed truth"

This slightly incoherent and decidedly pessimistic speech was moaned, rather than spoken, by a lean-bodied, hard-faced, staring-eyed woman to a pretty girl, who did not look at the speaker And small wonder Mrs Merry—inappropriate name—was unattractive to the eye She was angular, grey skinned, grey eyed, grey haired, and had thin, drooping lips almost as grey as the rest of her In her black stuff gown—she invariably wore the most funereal dresses—with uneasy hands folded under a coarse apron, she stood before Eva Strode, uttering lamentations worthy of Jeremiah at his worst But such dumpishness was characteristic of the woman She delighted in looking on the black side of things, and the blacker they were, the more she relished them Out of wrong-doing, and grief and things awry, she extracted a queer sort of pleasure, and felt never so happy as when the worst came to the worst It seemed unfit that such a walking pageant of woe should be called Merry

Eva, already depressed by the voice and sentiment of this lamentable dame, continued to look at the gaudy hollyhocks, even while she answered calmly, "I expect my father is the same as he was when he went to South Africa five years ago I don't hope to find him an angel I am certain he has not changed"

"If you're thinking of black angels," said the lively Merry, "you can have satisfactions from thinking him Beelzebub, for him he are"

"Don't call my father names It does no good, Mrs Merry"

"Beg pardon, miss, but it do relieve the heart and temper And I will call him a leper, if that's a name, seeing as he'll never change his spots, however persuaded"

"What's the time?"

Mrs Merry peered into the dial of a clock on the mantelpiece "You might call it six, Miss Eva, and a lovely evening it is, though rain may spile it unexpected Your pa 'ull be seated at the table in the next room at eight, let us hope, if nothing do happen to him, and I do pray on my bended knees, Miss Eva, as he won't growl at the meal, his habit allays when your poor dear ma—her ladyship was alive Ah well," said Mrs Merry with emphasis, "*she's* an angel now, and your pa ain't likely to trouble her again"

"Why don't you think my father may come home? I mean, why do you fancy anything may happen to him?"

"Oh, I ain't got no cause, but what you might call the uncertainties of this vale of tears, Miss Eva. He have to drive ten mile here from the Westhaven station, and there's tramps about them lonely roads Coming from South Africa, your pa 'ull naturally have diamonds to tempt the poor"

"I don't know what he has got," said Eva rather pettishly "And no

one, save you and me, know he is returning from Africa"

"No one, Miss Eva?" questioned the woman significantly.

Miss Strode coloured "I told Mr Hill"

"And he told his pa, and his pa, who have a long tongue, told all the village, I don't doubt If ever there was a man as fiddled away his days in stillness,' cried Merry, "it's that pink and white jelly-fish as you call Hills"

"Hill," corrected Miss Strode then added colouring "His son doesn't take after him'

"No," admitted the other grudgingly, "I will say as Mr Allen is a tight lad His mother gave him her blood and sense and looks, not that I say he's worthy of you, Miss Eva'

"Mrs Merry," said Eva quietly, "you let your tongue run on too freely about my friends'

"Not the father Hills, if I die in saying it He's no friend of yours, seeing he's your pa's, and as to Mr Allen, I never had a sweetheart as I called friend, when you could call him something better'

Eva took no notice of this speech, but continued, "You are my old nurse, Mrs Merry, and I allow you to talk openly——"

"For your good, Miss Eva," put in Merry

"For my good, I know," said the girl, "but you must not run down Allen's father or mine"

'As to his father, I say nothing but that he's a drivelling jelly-fish," said Mrs Merry, who would not be suppressed, "but your own pa I know, worse luck, and I don't think much of him as a man, whatever I say about his being Beelzebub, which he is Fifty years and more he is, fine-looking at that, though wickedness is in his aching bones Not that I know of their aching," explained Mrs Merry, "but if sin would make 'em smart, ache they do. You've been happy with me, Miss Eva, dear, in spite of a humble roof and your poor ma's death, four and a half year back But your pa's come home to make trouble Satan let loose as what I call him, and if I could stop his coming by twisting his wicked neck, I would"

"Mrs Merry!" Eva rose quickly and flushed "You forget yourself"

"There," said Mrs Merry, casting up her eyes, "and I fed her with my own milk'

Eva, who was tenderly attached to the angular, dismal, chattering woman, could not withstand this remark "Dear Nanny," she said, comforting the wounded heart, "I know you mean well, but my father is my father after all"

"Worse luck, so he is,' sobbed Mrs Merry, feeling for Eva's hand

"I wish to think of him as kindly as I can and——"

"Miracles won't make you do that," interrupted the woman, dropping her apron from her eyes, and glaring "Miss Eva, I knew your pa when he was a bad boy, both him and me being neighbours, as you might say, though I did live in a cottage and he in a Manor House not two mile from it He and that jelly-fish of a Hills were always together doing mischief, and setting neighbours by the ears, though I do say as your pa, being master, led that jelly-fish away Then your pa ran away with Lady Jane Delhan your ma, as is dead, and treated her shameful She come here to me, as an old friend, for friend I was, though humble," sobbed Mrs Merry, weeping again, "and you were born. Then your pa takes you away and I never set eyes on you and my lady till five years ago when he brought you here To settle down and make you happy' No! not he. Away he goes gallivanting to South Africa where the blacks are, leaving a lady born and bred and his daughter just a bud, meaning yourself, to live with a common woman like me!"

"I have been very happy, Nanny, and my mother was happy also, when she was alive"

"Ah," said Mrs. Merry bitterly

"a queer sort of happiness, to be that way when your husband goes I've had a trial myself in Merry, who's dead, and gone, I hope, where you'll find your pa will join him But you'll see, Miss Eva, as your pa will come, and stop your marrying Mr Allen"

"I think that's very likely," said Eva sadly

"What," said Mrs Merry under her breath, and rising, "he's at it already is he? I thought so"

"I received a letter from him the other day, explained Eva, "knowing your prejudice against my father, I said nothing"

"Me not to be trusted, I 'spose, Miss Eva?" was the comment

"Nonsense I trust you with anything"

"And well you may I fed you with my heart's blood, and foster sister you are to my boy Cain, though, Lord knows, he's as bad as his father was before him the gipsy whelp that he is Not on my side, though," cried Mrs Merry "I am true English, and why I ever took up with a Romany rascal like Giles Merry, I don't know but he's dead, I hope he is though I ever can be sure, me not knowing where's his grave Come now, Mrs Merry gave her face a wipe with the apron, "I'm talking of my own troubles, when yours is about That letter ——?"

"It is one in answer to mine I wrote to Cape Town three months ago telling my father that I was engaged to Allen Hill He wrote the other day—a week ago—from Southampton saying he would not permit the marriage to take place, and bade me wait till he came home"

"Trouble! trouble," said Mrs Merry, rocking, "I know the man Ah, my dear, don't talk I'm thinking for your good"

It was hot outside, though the sun was sinking and the cool twilight shadowed the earth. The hollyhocks, red and blue and white and yellow, a blaze of colour, were drooping their heads in the warm air, and the lawn looked brown and burnt for want of rain Not a breath of wind moved the dusty sycamore trees which divided the cottage from the high-road, and the crimson hue of the setting sun steeped everything in its sinister dye. Perhaps it was this uncanny evening that made Eva Strode view the home-coming of her father with such uneasiness, and the hostility and forebodings of Mrs Merry did not tend to reassure her With her hand on that dismal prophetess's shoulder, she stood silently looking out on the panting world bathed in the ruddy light It was as though she saw the future through a rain of blood

Misery Castle was the name of the cottage, and Mrs Merry was responsible for the dreary appellation Her life had been hard and was hard Her husband had left her, and her son, following in his father's footsteps, was almost constantly absent in London in more than questionable company Mrs Merry therefore called the cottage by as dismal a name as she could think of Even Eva, who protested against the name, could not get the steadfastly dreary woman to change it "Misery dwells in it, my dear lamb," said Mrs Merry, "and Misery it shall be called Castle it ain't from the building of it, but Castle it is seeing the lot of sorrow that's in it Buckingham Palace and the Tower wouldn't hold more, and more there will be, when that man comes home with his wicked sneering face, father though he be to you, my poor young lady"

It was a delightful cottage, with whitewashed walls covered with creepers, and a thatched roof, grey with wind and weather and the bleaching of the sun The rustic porch was brilliant with red roses, and well-kept garden-beds bloomed with rainbow-hued flowers seasonable to the August month To the right this domain was divided from a wide and gorse-covered common by an

ancient wall of mellow-hued brick, useful for the training of peach-trees, to the left a low hedge, with unexpected gaps, ran between the flower-beds and a well-stocked orchard. This last extended some distance, and ended in a sunken fence, almost buried in nettles and rank weeds Beyond stretched several meadows, in which cows wandered, and further still, appeared fields of wheat, comfortable farm-houses, clumps and lines of trees, until the whole fertile expanse terminated at the foot of low hills, so far away that they looked blue and misty A smiling corn-land, quite Arcadian in its peace and beauty

Along the front of the cottage and under the dusty sycamore trees ran a high-road which struck straightly across the common, slipped by Misery Castle, and took its way crookedly through Wargrove village, whence it emerged to twist and turn for miles towards the distant hills and still more distant London town. Being the king's highway it was haunted by tramps, by holiday vans filled with joyous folk, and by fashionable motor-cars spinning noisily at illegal speed But neither motor-cars, nor vans, nor tramps, nor holiday-makers stopped at Wargrove village, unless for a moment or two at the one public-house on thirsty days These went on ten miles further across the common to Westhaven, a rising watering-place at the Thames mouth So it will be seen that the publicity of the highway afforded Eva a chance of seeing the world on wheels, and diversified her somewhat dull existence

And it was dull, until a few months ago. Then Allen Hill came home from South America, where he had been looking after mines. The young people met and subsequently fell in love. Three months before the expected arrival of Mr. Stands they became engaged with the consent of Allen's parents but without the knowledge of Eva's father. However, being a dutiful daughter to a man who did not deserve such a blessing, she wrote and explained herself. The reply was the letter mention of which she had made to Mrs. Merry And Mrs Merry prognosticated trouble therefrom

"I know the man—I know the man," moaned Mrs Merry, rocking herself, "he'll marry you to some one else for his ambitions, drat him"

"That he shall never do," flashed out Eva

"You have plenty of spirit, Miss Eva, but he'll wear you out He wore out Lady Jane, your ma, as is now where he will never go And was it this that set you moping by the winder, my dear lamb?"

Eva returned to her former seat "Not altogether" She hesitated, and then looked anxiously at her old nurse, who stood with folded arms frowning and rigid "You believe in dreams, Mrs Merry?"

"As I believe that Merry was a scoundrel, and that my boy will take after him, as he does," said the woman, nodding sadly, "misery ain't sure nor dreams, nor taxes which allays come bringing sorrow and summonses with 'em So you dreamed last night?"

"Yes You know I went to bed early I fell asleep at eight and woke at nine, trembling"

"Ah!" Mrs Merry drew nearer—"'twas a baddish dream?"

"A horrible dream—it was, I think, two dreams"

"Tell it to me," said the old woman, her eyes glittering

Eva struck her closed fist on the sill "No," she cried passionately, "it's unpossible to tell it I wish to forget"

"You'll remember it well enough when the truth comes"

"Do you think anything will come of it?"

"It's as sure as sure," said Mrs Merry.

Eva, less superstitious, laughed uneasily, and tried to turn the subject. "Allen will be at the gate soon," she said. "I'm walking to the common with him for an hour."

"Ah well," droned Mrs. Merry, "take your walk, Miss Eva You won't have another when *he* comes home."

"Nurse!" Eva stamped her foot and frowned. "You make my father out to be a——"

"Whatever I make him out to be, I'll never get near what he is," said Mrs Merry viciously "I hate him He ruined my Giles, not as Giles was much to boast of Still, I could have talked him into being a stay-at-home, if your pa—there—there—let him be, say I If his cup is full he'll never come home alive"

Eva started and grew deathly pale "My dream—my dream," she said

"Ah yes!" Mrs Merry advanced and clutched the girl's wrist "You saw him dead or dying, eh, eh?"

"Don't, nurse, you frighten me," said Miss Strode, releasing her wrist, then she thought for a moment "My dream or dreams," said she after a pause, "went something after this fashion I thought I was in the Red Deeps——"

"Five miles from here," muttered Mrs Merry, hugging herself "I know the place—who better? Red clay and a splash of water, however dry"

"Ah, you are thinking of the spring!" said Eva starting, "it was there I saw—oh no—no," and she closed her eyes to shut out the sight

"What was it—what was it?" asked Mrs Merry eagerly, "death?"

"He was lying face downward in the moist red clay beside the spring of the Red Deeps!"

"Who was lying?"

"I don't know I seemed to see the place and the figure of a man in dark clothes lying face downward, with his hands twisted helplessly in the rank grasses I heard a laugh too—a cruel laugh, but in my dream I saw no one else Only the dead man, face downward," and she stared at the carpet as though she saw the gruesome sight again.

"How do you know 'twas your father's corpse?" croaked the old woman

"I didn't think it was—I didn't tell you it was," panted Eva, flushing and paling with conflicting emotions.

"Ah," interpreted Mrs. Merry, "some one he killed, perhaps."

"How dare you—how dare——? Nurse," she burst out, "I believe it *was* my father lying dead there—I saw a white-gloved right hand"

"Your pa, sure enough," said the woman grimly. "His wooden hand, eh" I know the hand. He struck me with it once. Struck me," she cried, rising and glaring, "with my own husband standing by. But Giles was never a man. So your pa was dead, wooden hand and all, in the Red Deeps? Did you go there to see, this day?"

"No, no," Eva shuddered, "it was only a dream"

"Part of one, you said?"

Miss Strode nodded "After I saw the body and the white glove on the wooden hand glimmering in the twilight—for twilight it was in my dream—I seemed to sink into darkness, and to be back in my bed—yes, in my bed in the room across the passage"

"Ah! you woke then?" said Mrs Merry, disappointed

"No, I swear I was not awake I was in my bed asleep, dreaming, for I heard footsteps—many footsteps come to the door—to the front door, then five knocks——"

"Five," said the woman, surprised

"Five knocks One hard and four soft Then a voice came telling me to take in the body. I woke with a cry, and found it was just after nine o'clock"

"Well, well," chuckled the old woman, "if Robert Strode is dead——"

"You can't be sure of that," said Eva fiercely, and regretted telling this dismal woman her dream.

"You saw the gloved hand—the wooden hand?"

"Bah! It is only a dream"

"Dreams come true. I've known

'em to come true," said Mrs Merry, rising, "and to-morrow I go to the Red Deeps to see"

"But my father comes home to-night"

"No," said Mrs Merry, with the mien of a sibyl, "he'll never come home again to the house where he broke a woman's heart"

And she went out laughing and muttering of the Red Deeps

CHAPTER II

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

Eva Strode was an extremely pretty blonde She had golden-brown hair which glistened in the sunshine, hazel eyes somewhat meditative in expression, and a complexion that Mrs Merry, in her odd way, compared to mixed roses and milk Her nose was delicate and straight, her mouth charming and sensitive and if it drooped a trifle at the corners, she had good cause for so melancholy a twist Her figure was so graceful that envious women, less favoured by Nature, suggested padding but these same depreciators could say nothing against her hands and feet, which were exquisitely formed Usually Eva, cunning enough to know that her beauty needed no adornment, dressed in the very plainest fashions At the present moment she was arrayed in a pale blue dress of some coarse material, and wore a large straw hat swathed in azure tulle An effective touch of more pronounced colour appeared in the knot of red ribbon at her throat and the bunch of crimson roses thrust into her waistband She looked dainty, well-bred, charming, and even the malignant female eye would have found little to blame But the female eye generally did find fault Eva was much too pretty a girl to escape remark.

This vision of loveliness walked demurely down the garden path to gladden the eyes of a young man lingering at the gate He, eagerly expecting the descent of Venus, quickly removed his Panama hat, and looked at the goddess with admiring eyes, eloquent of unspoken praise Eva, feeling, rather than meeting, their fervid gaze, halted within the barrier and blushed as red as the roses in her belt Then she ventured to look at her lover, and smiled a welcome

Certainly the lover was not unworthy of the lass, so far as looks went Allen Hill was as dark as Eva was fair Indeed, he more resembled a Spaniard than an Englishman His oval face, smooth and clean-shaven save for a small, smartly pointed moustache, was swarthy his eyes were wonderfully black and large, and his closely clipped hair might be compared to the hue of the raven's wing His slim figure was clothed in white flannels, so well cut and spotless that they conveyed a suspicion that the young gentleman was something of a dandy He looked more like a poet than a mining engineer

Yet an engineer he was, and had travelled over the greater part of the world with his eyes open These looked languid enough as a rule, but they could blaze with a fighting light, as his associates in the lands at the back of Beyond knew At thirty years of age Allen knew quite as much as was good for him, and knew also how to utilise his knowledge In many lands he had seen fair women, but none had captured his heart as had this dewy, fragrant English rose

Six months earlier the two had met at a garden party. Allen came and saw, and Eva—as women always do—conquered The engineer's heart, being tinder, caught fire easily and began to blaze with a fiery flame not to be extinguished by reason. Eva herself, not being tame either, rather liked this Sabine courtship, and did not leave Allen long in doubt as to the way in which she regarded his audacious advances. The result was that in a few months they became engaged, and the flower-time of their

love came almost as speedily as did that of Romeo and Juliet. But now, as Eva well knew, the common-sense of the world was about to chill their ardour. She had this very evening to inform this eager, whole-hearted lover that her father refused to sanction the engagement. No easy task, seeing she loved the man with her whole heart and soul.

"My dear, my love," murmured Allen, as the gate closed behind the girl, and he would have embraced her in the public road, but that she dexterously evaded his widely spread arms.

"Not here—not here," she whispered hurriedly, and with a fine colour, "it's too public, you stupid boy."

The stupid boy, cheated of his treat, glared up and down the road. "I don't see any one," he grumbled.

"Eyes at those windows," said Eva, waving a slim hand towards a row of thatched cottages, "and tongues also."

"I am not ashamed of our love. I wish the whole world knew of it."

"The whole world probably does," rejoined Miss Strode, a little dryly, "if any one saw you with those eyes and that look, and—oh, you ridiculous boy!" and she shook her finger at him.

"Oh you coquette. Can't we——"

"On the common we can talk, if that is what you mean," said Eva, turning away to trip up the dusty road, "the common," she cried with a backward look which should have drawn the young man after her at a fine pace.

But Allen lingered for a moment. Deeply in love as he was, he had his own ideas regarding the management of the fair sex. He knew that when a woman is sure of her swain she is apt to be exacting, so as to check his ardour. On the other hand, if the swain hangs back, the maid comes forward with winsome looks. Hitherto, Allen had been all passion and surrender. Now he thought he would tease Eva a little, by not coming immediately to her beck and call. Therefore, while she skipped ahead—and without looking back, so sure was she that Allen followed—the young man lighted a cigarette, and when the smoke perfumed the air, looked everywhere save in the direction he desired to look. North, south, west looked Allen, but never east, where could be seen the rising sun of his love. But passion proved to be stronger than principle, and finally his eyes fastened on the shadowy figure of Eva pausing on the edge of the common. She was looking back now, and beckoned with persuasive finger. Allen made a step forward to follow the siren, then halted. A strange feeling took possession of him. Allen's mother was Scotch, and having the impressionable Celtic nature, he was quick to feel the influences of that unseen world which lies all round, invisible to dull eyes, and unfelt by material souls. At the moment, in spite of the warmth, he had what the Scotch call a "grue," and shivered where he stood. At his back sank the sun red and angry, peering through lines of black cloud suggestive of prison bars. The scarlet light flooded the landscape in a sinister manner, and dyed the flitting figure of Eva in crimson hues. She looked as though bathed in blood, and—as she was now speeding towards the trysting place—as though she fled from justice. Also, she ran from the red west into the gloom of the east, already shadowy with the coming night. Was there no parable in this? considered Allen, and shivered again.

"Indigestion," thought Allen, striving to throw off that weird feeling and trying to explain it in the most commonplace way. But he knew well that he had never in his life suffered from indigestion, and that the feeling—which had now passed away—was a hint of coming evil. "To me, I hope," murmured the young man, stepping out briskly, "not to Eva, poor darling."

When he joined the girl, he was quite his old fervid self, and felt his premonitions pass away in the charm of the hour. Even the sunset was less scarlet and more of a rosy tint like his

new thoughts He threw himself at the feet of his beloved, cast away his cigarette, and took her hand within his For the moment Dan Cupid was king

But was he? Eva did not appear to think so She allowed her hand to remain in Allen's warm grip, but he felt no responsive pressure. The two were seated on a rustic bench within a circle of flowering gorse The sward was green and smooth, worthy of the dancing feet of Titania's elves and perhaps it might have been one of their ballrooms the lovers had invaded In that case it would certainly prove unhappy ground to them The fairies do not like mortals, however loving, who intrude on their privacy The elves, however, not yet awakened by the moon, made no sign, and in that still place no sound could be heard Overhead was the flushed sky, underfoot the emerald sward, and there were the lovers supplied with an admirable stage on which to play their parts Allen was willing enough, and looked up adoringly into the face of his Juliet But Eva's gaze was fixed on the orange-hued blossom of the gorse with a far away look And when she spoke, it certainly was not of love

"Allen," she said, in a calm, level voice, "we have known each other for nearly a year"

"Call it a century," said Allen, kissing her hand "I love you and you love me. Why talk of time? Love like ours lives in eternity"

"Hum," said Eva, although the ejaculation was not a pretty one, "the question is, Will it live at all?"

"Eva!" He raised himself on his elbow and stared, but the girl continued to speak without looking at him

"Do you know my history, Allen?" she asked, then without waiting for his reply, went on in a passionless way "My father is the last Strode of Wargrove The manor house of our race is only a few miles away, and there the Strodes lived for centuries. My grandfather, however, was an extravagant man, and lost all the money. When my father returned from Oxford to take up his position in the world, he found that his father was dead and that the estate would have to be sold to pay the debts In that way, Allen, the manor passed from our family"

"I have heard something of this, Eva," said the perplexed young man, "but why waste time in telling me of it now?"

"You will find the time will not be wasted," rejoined Eva, glancing down with something like pity "let me go on My father, brought up in a luxurious way, took what money there was left and went to seek work in London He speculated, and knowing nothing about speculation he lost everything Then your father, who was his friend at school and college, lent him some thousands, and my father, to better his position, married Lady Jane Delham, daughter of the Earl of Ipsen I understand that the money which she brought with her, was lost also—in speculation"

"But why did your father speculate so much?" asked Allen

"His one desire was to buy back the manor," said Eva "He has much pride of race, and wants to end his days under the roof where he was born But let me go on once more The money was lost, and Lord Ipsen died His title went to a distant cousin, who did not like my mother, consequently there was no chance of my father getting more money in that quarter I was born under Mrs Merry's roof, but till the age of seven I lived with my mother in a small Hampstead cottage My father went on speculating. Sometimes he made money, at other times he lost it, but always, he followed the will-o'-the-wisp of fortune, hoping to get back his old home He then went to South America, and took my mother with him I was placed at school, and until I was fifteen I never saw my parents"

"Poor Eva, how lonely you must have been!"

"I was lonely; and yet—having

seen so little of my parents I don't know that I missed them so very much My father stopped in Peru till I was fifteen, and my mother with him He came back poor, but with sufficient money to speculate again He therefore placed my mother and me in Misery Castle"

"Ridiculous name," muttered Allen uneasily

"A very appropriate name," said Eva with some bitterness, "seeing how unhappy Mrs Merry is She had a bad husband and has a bad son My mother was also unhappy Meeting her again after all those years, I did my best to comfort her But her heart was broken"

"Your father?" asked Allen in a low voice

"Who else?" replied Eva, flushing, and the water came to her eyes "Oh! Allen, I do not wish to speak ill, or to think ill, of my father but—no! she broke off, suppressing herself "I cannot speak from what I have seen, and I judge no one, let alone my father, on what I have heard Mrs Merry thinks badly of my father, and my poor mother—ah! my poor mother! she said as little as she could But her heart was broken, Allen she died of a broken heart and a crushed spirit I lost her five months after my father went to seek his fortune in South Africa, and since then I have lived alone with Mrs Merry"

"Poor Eva!" said Hill tenderly, and repossessed himself of the hand which she had withdrawn "But Mrs Merry is good to you?"

"Very—very good," said Miss Strode with emphasis "She was my nurse and foster-mother, Allen When I was born my father came here for a time before taking the Hampstead cottage Well, Allen, that is my history My father all these five years has paid Mrs Merry for my board and lodging, and has sent home pocket-money for me But all that time he has never written me a tender letter"

"Not even when his wife died?"

"No. He wrote a few words of sympathy, but not those which a father should have written to a motherless girl From what I know of him, and from what Mrs. Merry says, he is a hard, cold, self-concentrated man I dread his coming more than I can tell you, Allen."

"If he ever does come," said the young man softly

Eva started and looked down "What do you mean by that?" she asked anxiously

Allen met her gaze frankly and laughed "Oh, you need not disturb yourself, my dear," he said with a shrug, "only you know my father and yours were always chums Why, I don't know, as my father is certainly not the kind of man to suit such a one as you describe Mr Strode to be But they were chums at school and college, and my father knows a lot about yours When I mentioned that your father was expected to-night, my father it was at breakfast—said that Mr Strode might not arrive after all I did not ask him what he meant"

"Could Mr Hill have heard from my father?"

"I can't say, and even if he did, I don't know why my father should suggest that Mr Strode would not come home But, Eva, you are pale"

"I feel pale," she said in a low voice "Allen, sit beside me I want to talk seriously—to tell you a dream."

The young man, nothing loath, promptly seated himself by her side and slipped a strong, tender arm round her slender waist Eva's heart beat stronger when she found herself in such an assured haven It seemed as though Allen, noble and firm and loving, would be able to shelter her from the coming storm "And the storm will come," she said aloud

"What is that?" asked Hill, not catching her meaning

"It is my dream," she answered, and then, with her head on his shoulder, she told about her vision of the night. Allen was inclined to make light of it

"You superstitious little darling,"

he said fondly, "the dream is easily accounted for You were thinking of your father, and, being anxious about his arrival, dreamed what you did"

Eva released herself, rather offended "I was thinking of my father, I admit," she said, "but I was not at all anxious My father has been all over the world, and in wild parts, so he can look after himself very well Besides, I never thought of the Red Deeps. And remember, Allen, I saw the right hand, gloved"

"That would seem to intimate that the dead man you saw in your dream was Mr Strode," said Allen kissing her, "but it's all nonsense, Eva"

"You don't think anything will happen?" she demanded, anxious to be reassured after Mrs Merry's gloomy talk

"No, I don't I have known of lots of dreams quite vivid which never came true I'm not a scientific chap," added Allen, laughing, "or I would be able to prove that this dream is only a reflex of your waking thoughts Mr Strode will arrive all right"

"And then we must part," sighed Eva

This time it was Hill who started, and his face flushed "I don't quite understand"

"You will soon I told you the history of my life, Allen, so that I might lead up to this I wrote to my father at Cape Town, telling him I loved you, and that Mr Hill was pleased we should be engaged"

"My father was delighted," put in Allen quickly

"So I said My father never replied to my letter save in sending a cablegram stating he was coming home in the *Dunoon Castle* When he was at Southampton, he wrote, saying I was not to think of marrying you, and that he would tell me of his plans for my future when he returned to Wargrove. He decided to remain for a week in London, and yesterday he wired that he was coming home to-night. So you see, Allen," Eva rested her head on her lover's shoulder, "he will part us."

"No!" cried Hill, rising and looking very tall and strong and determined, "he will never do that What reason——"

"My father is a man who will refuse to give his reason"

"Not to me," rejoined the other hotly "Mr Strode will not dare to dismiss me in so easy and off-hand a fashion I love you, Eva, and I marry you, whatever your father may say Unless," he caught her hands as she rose, and stared deep into her eyes, "unless you leave me"

"No! no! I never will do that, Allen Come what may, I'll be true"

Then followed an interlude of kisses, and afterwards the two, hand in hand, walked across the common on their way to Misery Castle It was not seven o'clock, but the twilight was growing darker "Do you know what your father's plans are?" asked Allen, as they stepped out on to the deserted and dusty road

"No I know nothing save what I tell you And my dream ---"

"Dearest, put the dream out of your head If it is any comfort to you I'll go to the Red Deeps to-night Do you think I'll find a dead body there?" he asked, laughing

"Not if you go before nine o'clock The dream was at nine last night"

"But your father will be home at eight, love"

"I hope so," she murmured

"You are so foolishly superstitious," said Allen, pressing her arm which was within his own; "you dear little goose, don't you see that if your father comes to Misery Castle at eight, he can't possibly be lying dead in the Red Deeps at nine When did you last hear from him, Eva?"

"Yesterday morning He wired that he would be down at eight this evening"

"Well then, he was alive then, and is stopping in town on business as you said. He will come to Westhaven by the train arriving at six-thirty and will drive over,"

"The road passes the Red Deeps," insisted Eva.

"How obstinate you are, Eva," said Allen, contracting his forehead; "I tell you what I'll do to set your mind at rest, you know he is alive now?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I got that wire yesterday morning."

"Well then, I'll set off to the Red Deeps at once, and will get there just at eight. I may meet Mr. Strode coming along in the fly, and if so I'll follow it back to Misery Castle, so as to see him safely home. If I don't, I'll go to the Red Deeps, and if any attack is made on him, I'll be there to give him a hand."

"Thank you, Allen. I should be more at ease if you did that."

"Then it shall be done," said Allen, kissing her, "but I feel that I am encouraging you in superstitious fancies."

"My dream was so vivid."

"Pooh! Indigestion."

"Then Mr. Hill hinted that my father might not return."

"Well then, I'll ask him what he meant, and explain when we meet again."

"If we ever do meet," sighed Eva, stopping at the gate.

"You will be true to me, Eva?"

"Always—always—always. There—there," she kissed him under the friendly shelter of the jasmine and ran indoors.

Allen turned on his heel in high spirits, and set out for the Red Deeps. At first he laughed at Eva's dream and Eva's superstition. But as he walked on in the gathering darkness, he felt as though the future also was growing more gloomy. He recalled his own feelings of the girl's dress dappled with blood, and of her flying form. Again he felt the "grue," and cursed himself for a old woman. "I'll find nothing—nothing," he said, trying to laugh.

But the shadow of the dream, which was also the shadow of the future, fell upon him darker than ever.

CHAPTER III

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL

Anxious to make the best impression on her father, Eva Strode ran up to her room to put on an evening gown. Mr. Strode supplied her liberally with money, for whatever his faults may have been, he certainly was not mean, therefore she possessed a fairly extensive wardrobe. She did not see Mrs. Merry on entering the cottage, as that good lady was occupied in looking after the dinner in the little back-kitchen. The table was laid, however, and after making herself smart, Eva descended to add a few finishing touches in the shape of flowers.

Cheered by the view Allen took of her dream, and still more by the fact that he had gone to the Red Deeps, Eva arranged many roses, red and white, in a great silver bowl which had belonged to her mother. As a matter of fact, Eva had been born in Misery Castle, and being sickly as a baby, had been christened hurriedly in the cottage out of the bowl, an heirloom of the Delbani family. Mrs. Merry had taken possession of it, knowing that, if Lady Jane took it away, her husband would speedily turn it into money. Therefore, Mrs. Merry being a faithful guardian, the bowl was still in the cottage, and on this night Eva used it as a centrepiece to the prettily decorated table. And it did look pretty. The cloth was whiter than snow, the silver sparkled and the crystal glittered, while the roses blooming in the massive bowl added a touch of needed colour.

There were evidences of Eva's taste in the small dining-room. Mrs. Merry had furnished it, certainly, but Eva had spent much of her pocket-money in decorating the room. Everything was charming and dainty and intensely feminine. Any one could see at a glance that it was a true woman's room. And Eva in her black gauze dress, bare-necked and bare armed, flitted gracefully about the tiny apart-

ment. Her last act was to light the red-shaded lamp which hung low over the table. The window she left open and the blind up, as the night was hot, and the breeze which cooled the room made the place more bearable.

"It's quite pretty," said Eva, standing back against the door to get the effect of the glittering table and the red light and the flowers. "If father is dissatisfied he must be hard to please," she sighed, "and from what Nanny says, I fear he is. A quarter to eight, he'll be here soon. I'd better see when the dinner will be ready."

But before doing so, she went to the front door and listened for the sound of wheels. She certainly heard them, but the vehicle was driving towards, and not from, the common. Apparently Mr. Strode was not yet at hand, so she went to the kitchen. To her surprise she heard voices. One was that of Mrs. Merry, querulous as usual, and the other a rich soft, melodious voice which Eva knew only too well. It was that of her foster-brother Cain.

This name was another of Mrs. Merry's eccentricities. Her husband, showing the brute within him a year after marriage, had disillusioned his poor wife very speedily. He was drunk when the boy was born, and still drunk when the boy was christened, Mrs. Merry therefore insisted that the boy would probably take after his father, and requested that the name of Cain should be given to him. The curate objected, but Mrs. Merry being firm and the curate weak, the boy was actually called after Adam's eldest son. Had the rector been at home such a scandal—as he regarded it—would not have occurred, but Mr. Quain was absent on a holiday, and returned to find an addition to his flock in the baby person of Cain Merry. The lad grew up handsome enough, but sufficiently wild and wicked to justify his mother's choice of a name. Yet he had his good moments, and might have improved had not his mother nagged him into wrong-doing.

"Well, Cain," said Eva, entering the kitchen, "so you're back?"

"Like a bad penny," cried Mrs. Merry, viciously stabbing some potatoes with a fork, "six months he's been away, and——"

"And I'd remained longer if I'd thought of getting this welcome, mother," growled Cain sulkily. "But I might have known."

He was a remarkably handsome lad of eighteen, almost as dark as Allen Hill. As Mr. Merry had gipsy blood in his veins, it was probable that Cain inherited the nature and looks of some splendid Romany ancestor. With his smooth dark skin, under which the rich red blood mantled, his eyes large and black as night and clearly-cut features, Cain looked as handsome as a picture. Not even the rough dress he wore, which was that of a labourer, could disguise his fine figure and youthful grace. He looked like a young panther, sleek, beautiful, and dangerous. Cap on head, he leaned against the jamb of the outer door—his mother would not allow him to come further—and seemed a young Apollo, so slim and graceful did he appear. But Mrs. Merry, gesticulating with the fork, had no eye for his good looks. He reminded her too much of the absent Merry, who was just such a splendid outlaw, when he won her to a bitterly regretted marriage. Cain, meeting with so unpleasant a reception, was sulky and inclined to be defiant, until Eva entered. Then he removed his cap, and became wonderfully meek. He was fond of his foster-sister, who could do much with him.

"When did you come back, Cain?" she asked.

"Ten minutes ago, and mother's been ragging me ever since,' he replied, "flesh and blood can't stand it, Miss Eva. I'll go."

"No you won't," struck in Mrs. Merry, "you'll stop and give the mother who bore you—worse luck—the pleasure of your company."

Cain grinned in a sleepy manner "Not much pleasure for me"

"Nor for me, you great hulking creature," said Mrs Merry, threatening him with a fork "I thought you'd grow up to be a comfort to me, but look at you - -"

"If you thought I'd be a comfort, why did you call me Cain, mother?"

"Because I knew what you'd turn out," contradicted Mrs Merry, "just like your father, oh, dear me, just like him Have you seen anything of your father, Cain?"

"No," said Cain stolidly "and I don't want to"

"That's right, deny the author of your being Your father, who was always a bad one, left me fifteen years ago, just after you were born The cottage was not then my own, or he'd never have left me But there, thank heaven,' cried Mrs Merry throwing up her eyes to the smoky ceiling, "father didn't die and leave me well off, till Giles went' Since that I've heard nothing of him He was reported dead - -"

"You -and you heard nothing of him, mother' put in Cain, smiling

"Don't show your teeth in that way at your mother,' snapped Mrs Merry, "what I say, I say, and no mistake Your father was reported dead, and as he's left me for seven years and more, I could marry again, if I were such a fool But I haven't, hoping you'd be a comfort to the mother who brought you into the world But you were always a bad boy, Cain You played truant from school, you ran away to become a navvy at thirteen, and again and again you came back in rags"

"I'm not in rags now," said Cain, restive under this tongue

"Then you must have stolen the clothes," retorted his mother, "I'll be bound you didn't come by them honestly not as they're much"

While this pleasant conversation was going on Eva stood mute She knew of old how impossible it was to stop Mrs. Merry's tongue, and thought it best to let her talk herself out But the last speech made Cain laugh, and he was cool enough to wink at Eva She knew Cain so intimately, and really liked him so much in spite of his wickedness, that she did not take offence, but strove to turn from him the wrathful speech of his mother

"I am sure Cain has turned over a new leaf,' she said, smiling

"He's turned over volumes of 'em," groaned Mrs Merry, dashing down a pot on the range, ' but each page is worst nor the last Oh, I know what I'm saying," she went on triumphantly "I was a farmer's daughter and had three years' schooling, not to speak of having mixed with the aristocracy in the person of your dear ma, Miss Eva, and your own blessed self as is always a lady But Cain - - oh, look at him"

"He looks very well," said Eva, 'and he looks hungry Don't you think you might give him a meal, Mrs Merry?"

"Kill the fatted calf as you might say,' suggested Cain impudently

"Calf!" screeched Mrs Merry, you're one yourself, Cain, to talk like that with Miss Eva present Ain't you got no respect?"

"Miss Eva knows I mean no harm," said the goaded Cain

"Of course you don't," said Miss Strode, 'come, Mrs Merry, the boy's home for good now,'

"For bad, you mean"

"I'm not home at all," said Cain unexpectedly "I'm working at Westhaven, but I came over just to see my mother If she don't want me I can go back to those who do," and he turned to go

"No Stop,' cried Mrs Merry, whose bark was worse than her bite "I shan't let a growing lad like you tramp back all them ten miles with a starving inside Wait till I get this dinner off my mind, and the pair of us will sit down like Christians to eat it."

Eva stared and laughed "You forget, nurse' this dinner is for my

father. He should be here in a few minutes"

Mrs. Merry turned grey "I ain't forgot your dream, my dear He'll never eat it for want of breath, nor you for sorrow Now. Cain——"

Miss Strode, who had a temper of her own, stamped a pretty slippered foot imperiously "Hold your tongue, Mrs Merry! she cried, the colour rising in her cheeks, "my father will arrive"

The old woman glanced at the American clock which stood on the mantelpiece The small hand pointed to eight "He ain't come yet"

"Cain," said Eva, turning, still flushed, to the lad, "you came along the Westhaven road?"

Cain nodded "Twenty minutes ago, Miss Eva,' said he

"Did you see my father? No, you don't remember my father Did you see a fly coming along?"

"No But then I didn't come along the road all the time I took a short cut across country, Miss Eva I'll just have a meal with mother, and then go back to my business"

"And what is your business, I'd like to know?" questioned Mrs Merry sharply, "a fine business it must be to take you from your mother"

"I'm in a circus"

"What, riding on horses in tights!" cried Mrs Merry aghast

"No such luck I'm only a groom at the billet when I was in London, and glad enough I was, seeing how hard up I've been It's Stag's Circus and a good show I hope you'll come over to Shanton to-morrow, Miss Eva, there's a performance at night, and you'll see some riding. Ah, Miss Lorry can ride a bit!"

"Miss who?" asked Eva, who, with the kitchen door open, was straining her ears to hear if Mr. Strode was coming

"Some low female, I'll be bound," snorted Mrs. Merry. "I've seen 'em dancing in pink stockings and raddling their brazen cheeks with paint She's no better than she ought to be, not she, my word you like"

Cain grew angry "You're quite wrong, mother," said he. "Miss Lorry is very much respected She rides her own horse, White Robin, and has appeared before crowned heads She's billed as the Queen of the Arena, and is a thing of beauty"

"Ha!" said Mrs Merry sharply, "and you love her Ho! You that told me you loved that freckle-faced, snub-nosed Jane Wasp, the daughter o' that upsetting Wasp policeman, with his duty-chatter, and——"

"I don't love any one," said Cain, putting on his cap, "and if you talk like that I'll go"

"To marry a circus rider Never enter my doors again if you do I've got this cottage and fifty pounds a year, inherited from my father, to leave, remember"

"Dear nurse," said Eva soothingly, "Cain has no idea of marrying"

"Miss Lorry wouldn't have me if I had," said Cain sadly, though his black eyes flashed fire, "why, Lord Saltars is after her"

"What!" shrieked Mrs Merry, turning sharply "Miss Eva's cousin?"

Cain looked astonished "Is he your cousin?" he asked

"Yes, Cain—a distant cousin He is the eldest son of Lord Ipson My mother was the daughter of the last Earl Is he in Westhaven?"

"Yes, miss He follows the circus everywhere, for love of her"

"We don't want to hear about those things" said Mrs. Merry sharply, "leave your Lorries and rubbish alone, and go and wash in my room I'll get the dinner ready soon, and then we can sit down for a chat"

"Another bullying," grumbled Cain, throwing down his cap and preparing to take a seat But he never did At that moment there came a long shrill whistle with several modulations like a bird's note Cain started, and cocked his handsome head on one side The whistle was repeated, upon which, without a word

rather to his mother or Miss Strode, he dashed out of the kitchen

"There," said Mrs Merry, waving the fork, "to treat his own lawful mother in that way—to say nothing of you, Miss Eva!"

"He'll come back soon," replied Eva

"Oh, he will, if there's money and food about But he'll get neither, after behaving in that way That my son should belong to a circus! Ah, I always said Cain was born for the gallows, like his father!"

"But you don't know if his father ——"

"I know what I know," replied Mrs Merry with dignity, "which is to say, nothing But Giles is what Giles was, and has everything likely to bring him to a rope's end I'll be the wife of one hanged man," added the old woman with relish, "and the mother of another Then my cup of misery will be full enough But, bless me, Miss Eva, don't stay here, getting that pretty dress all greasy Go and wait for your pa in the dining-room, and I'll bring in the dinner as soon as I hear him swearing—for swear he will, if he arrive"

"Of course he'll arrive," said Eva impatiently, looking at the clock, which now indicated five minutes past eight, "he's a little late"

Mrs Merry shook her head "He'll not come He's in the Red Deeps, lying face downward in the mud"

Eva grew angry at this persistent pessimism, but nothing she could say or do, was able to change Mrs Merry's opinion Finding that more talk with the prophetess only made her angry, Eva returned to the front of the house, and, sitting in the drawing-room, took up the last fashionable novel which she had borrowed But not all the talent of the author was able to enchain her attention She kept thinking of her father and of the Red Deeps, and kept also looking at the clock It was drawing to nine when she went again to the front door, subsequently to the gate

There was no sign of Cain coming back. He had appeared like a ghost and had vanished as one Why the whistle should have made him turn pale and take so abrupt a departure, Eva was not able to say. Moreover, the non-arrival of her father fully occupied her attention She could not believe that her dream vivid as it had been, would prove true, and set down her nervous fears, which were now beginning to get the upper hand, to Mrs Merry's chatter That old woman appeared at her elbow while she leaned over the gate, looking down the road.

"He ain't come," croaked Mrs Merry "Bless you, deary, of course he ain't I know where he is, and you saw him in your dream"

"Nonsense," said Eva, and ran out on to the road A few people were passing—mostly villagers, but Eva was well known and no one was surprised at seeing her hatless Even if any one had expressed surprise, she was too anxious to trouble much about public opinion

"Aaron," she asked an old man who came trudging down from the common, "did you see my father coming along in a fly?"

"Why, miss," said Aaron scratching his shock head, "it's a matter of five year since I saw your father, and I don't rightly know as I'd tell him But I ain't seen nothing but carts this evening, ay and you might say bicycles"

"No fly?"

"Not one, miss. Good-evening. I dare say your father will walk, miss, by reason of the hot evening."

This suggestion was the very reverse of what Mr Strode would do, he being a gentleman mindful of his own comfort However, after the rustic had departed, Eva ran up as far as the common There was no sign of any vehicle, so she returned to the cottage. Mrs. Merry met her at the door

"The dinner spiling," said Mrs Merry crossly, "do come and eat

some, Miss Eva, and I'll keep the dishes hot"

"No, I'll wait till my father comes Is Cain back?"

"Not a sign of him But, lor bless you, deary, I never expected it, not me. He's gone to his circuses, to think that a son of mine ——"

But the girl was in no humour to hear the lamentations of Mrs Merry over the decay of her family, and returned to the drawing room There she sat down again and began to read —or try to

Mrs Merry came in at half past nine, and brought a cup of tea, with a slice of toast Eva drank the tea, but declined the toast, and the old woman retired angrily, to remove the spoilt dinner Then Eva played a game of patience, and at ten threw down the cards in despair The non-arrival of her father, coupled with her dream, made her restless and uneasy "I wish Allen would return," she said aloud But Allen never appeared, although by now he had ample time to reach the Red Deeps and to return therefrom It was in Eva's mind to go to Mr Hill's house, which was at the further end of Wargrove village, but a mindful thought of Mr Hill's jokes, which were usually irritating, made her hesitate She therefore went back to the kitchen, and spoke to Mrs Merry, who was crooning over the fire

"What are you doing?" she asked snappishly, for her nerves, poor girl, were worn thin by this time

"I'm waiting for the body," said Mrs Merry grimly

Eva bit her lip to keep down her anger, and returned to the drawing-room, where she wandered hopelessly up and down While straining her ears she heard footsteps and ran to the door It proved to be a telegraph boy, dusty and breathless Eva snatched the wire from him, although she was surprised at its late arrival As she opened the envelope, the boy explained needlessly—

"It come at four," he said, "and I forgot to bring it, so the Head sent me on all these ten mile, miss, at this hour by way of punishment And I ain't had no supper," added the injured youth

But Eva did not heed him She was reading the wire, which said that Mr Strode had postponed his departure from town till the morrow, and would then be down by mid-day "There's no reply," said Eva curtly, and went to the kitchen for the fifth time that evening. The messenger boy grumbled at not getting a shilling for his trouble, quite forgetting that the late arrival of the wire was due to his own carelessness He banged the front gate angrily, and shortly rode off on his red-painted bicycle

"My father's coming to morrow," said Eva, showing the telegram

Mrs Merry read it, and gave back the pink paper "Let them believe it as does believe," said she, "but he'll not come"

"But the wire is signed by himself, you stupid woman," said Eva

"Well and good," said Mrs Merry, "but dreams are dreams, whatever you may say, deary You pa was coming before and put it off now he put it off again, and —"

"Then you believe he sent the wire There, there, I know you will contradict me," said Miss Strode crossly, "I'm going to bed"

"You'll be woke up soon," cried Mrs Merry after her, "them knocks——"

Eva heard no more She went to her room, and, wearied out by waiting and anxiety, retired speedily to bed Mrs Merry remained seated before the kitchen fire, and even when twelve struck she did not move The striking of the clock woke Eva She sat up half asleep, but was speedily wide awake She heard footsteps, and listened breathlessly A sharp knock came to the front door Then four soft knocks. With a cry she sprang from her bed, and ran to the door. Mrs. Merry met her, and kept her back

"They've brought him home, miss," she said "the dream's come true"

CHAPTER IV

MYSTERY

Mr Hill's house at the far end of the village was an eccentric building Originally it had been a labourer's cottage, and stood by itself, a stone-throw away from the crooked highway which bisected Wargrove On arriving in the neighbourhood some twenty five years before, Mr Hill had bought the cottage and five acres of land around These he enclosed with a high wall of red brick, and then set to work to turn the cottage into a mansion As he was his own architect the result was a strange mingling of styles

The original cottage remained much as it was, with a thatched roof and whitewashed walls But to the left, rose a round tower built quite in the mediaeval style, to the right stretched a two storey mansion with oriel windows, a terrace and Tudor battlements At the back of this, the building suddenly changed to a bungalow with a tropical verandah, and the round tower stood at the end of a range of buildings built in the Roman fashion with sham marble pillars, and mosaic encrusted walls Within, the house was equally eccentric There was a Spanish patio, turned, for the sake of the climate, into a winter garden and roofed with glass The dining room was Jacobean, the drawing room was furnished in the Louis Quatorze style, Mr Hill's library was quite an old English room with casements and a low roof There were many bedrooms built in the severe graceful Greek fashion, a large marble swimming-bath after the ancient Roman type, and Mr Hill possessed a Japanese room, all bamboo furniture and quaintly pictured walls, for his more frivolous moods. Finally there was the music-room with a great organ, and this room was made in the similitude of a church On these freaks and fancies Mr Hill spent a good deal of money, and the result was an *olla podrida* of buildings, jumbled together without rhyme or reason Such a mansion—if it could be called so—might exist in a nightmare, but only Mr Hill could have translated it into fact Within and without, the place was an example of many moods It illustrated perfectly the mind of its architect and owner

Allen's father was a small, delicate, dainty little man with a large head and a large voice, which boomed like a gong when he was angry The man's head was clever and he had a fine forehead, but there was a streak of madness in him, which led him to indulge himself in whatever mood came uppermost He did not exercise the least self control, and expected all around him to give way to his whims, which were many and not always agreeable Some one called Mr Hill a brownie, and he was not unlike the pictures of that queer race of elves His body was shapely enough, but as his legs were thin and slightly twisted, these, with his large head, gave him a strange appearance His face was clean-shaven, pink and white, with no wrinkles He had a beautifully formed mouth and a set of splendid teeth His fair hair, slightly —very slightly—streaked with grey, he wore long, and had a trick of passing his hand through it when he thought he had said anything clever His hands were delicate—real artistic hands—but his feet were large and ill-formed He strove always to hide these by wearing wide trousers Both in winter and summer he wore a brown velvet coat and white serge trousers, no waistcoat, and a frilled shirt with a waist-band of some gaudy Eastern stuff sparkling with gold thread and rainbow hues. When he went out, he wore a straw hat with a gigantic brim, and as he was considerably under the ordinary height, he looked strange in this headgear But however queer his

garb may have been in the daytime, at night Mr Hill was always accurately attired in evening dress of the latest cut, and appeared a quiet, if somewhat odd, English gentleman

This strange creature lived on his emotions. One day he would be all gaiety and mirth, the next morning would see him silent and sad At times he played the organ, the piano, the violin, again he would take to painting, then he would write poems, and anon his mood would change to a religious one Not that he was truly religious He was a Theosophist, a Spiritualist, sometimes a Roman Catholic, and at times a follower of Calvin Lately he fancied that he would like to be a Buddhist. His library, a large one, was composed of various books bought in different moods, which illustrated—like his house—the queer jumbled mind of the man Yet with all his eccentricity Mr Hill was far from being mad He was clever at a bargain, and took good care of the wealth, which he had inherited from his father, who had been a stockbroker At times Mr. Hill could talk cleverly and in a businesslike way, at others, he was all fantasy and vague dreams Altogether an irritating creature People said they wondered how Mrs Hill could put up with such a changeling in the house.

Mrs. Hill put up with it—though the general public did not know this—simply for the sake of Allen, whom she adored It was strange that Allen, tall, stalwart, practical, and quiet, with a steadfast mind and an open nature, should be the son of the freakish creature he called father But the young man was in every way his mother's son Mrs Hill was tall, lean, and quiet in manner Like Mrs Merry, she usually wore black, and she moved silently about the house, never speaking, unless she was spoken to. Originally she had been a bright girl, but marriage with the brownie had sobered her. Several times during her early married life she was on the point of leaving Hill, thinking she had married a madman, but when Allen was born, Mrs Hill resolved to endure her lot for the sake of the boy Hill had the money, and would not allow the control of it to pass out of his hands Mrs Hill had come to him as a pauper, the daughter of an aristocratic scamp who had gambled away a fortune Therefore, so that Allen might inherit his father's wealth, which was considerable, the poor woman bore with her strange husband Not that Hill was unkind He was simply selfish, emotional, exacting, and irritating Mrs Hill never interfered with his whims, knowing from experience that interference would be useless She was a cypher in the house and left everything to her husband Hill looked after the servants, arranged the meals, ordered the routine, and danced through life like an industrious butterfly

As to Allen, he had speedily found that such a life was unbearable, and for the most part remained away He had early gone to a public school, and had left it for college, then he had studied in London to be an engineer and took the first opportunity to procure work beyond the seas He wrote constantly to his mother, but hardly ever corresponded with his father When he came to England he stopped at "The Arabian Nights"—so the jumbled house was oddly named by its odd owner—but always, he had gone away in a month On this occasion the meeting with Eva kept him in Wargrove, and he wished to be sure of her father's consent to the match before he went back to South America Meantime his partner carried on the business in Cuzco Mr Hill was not ill pleased that Allen should stop, as he was really fond of his son in his own selfish way Also he approved of the engagement to Eva, for whose beauty he had a great admiration

On the morning after Mr Strode's expected arrival, the three people who

dwelt in "The Arabian Nights" were seated in the Jacobean dining-room Mr Hill, in his invariable brown velvet coat with a rose in his button hole and a shining morning face, was devouring *pâté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches, and drinking claret At times he took a regular English egg-and-bacon, coffee and marmalade breakfast, but he varied his meals as much as he did his amusements One morning, bread and milk the next he would imitate Daniel and his friends to the extent of living on pulse and water, then a Continental roll and coffee would appeal to him, and finally, as on the present occasion he would eat viands more suited to a luncheon than to a breakfast However, on this especial morning he announced that he was in a musical mood, and intended to compose during the day

"Therefore,' said Mr Hill, sipping his claret and trifling with his sandwiches, "the stomach must not be laden with food This," he touched the sandwiches, "is nourishment to sustain him, during the struggle with melody, and the wine is of a delicate than nature which maketh the heart glad without leading to the vice of intoxication Burgundy, I grant you, is too heavy Champagne might do much to raise the airy fancy, but I believe in claret, which makes blood, and the brain during the agonies of composition needs a placid flow of blood'

Mrs Hill smiled wearily at this speech and went on eating She and Allen were engaged in disposing of a regular English meal, but neither seemed to enjoy the food Mrs Hill, silent and unemotional, ate like one who needs food to live, and not as though she cared for the victuals Allen looked pale and haggard. His face was white, and there were dark circles under his eyes as though he had not slept

"Late hours," said his father, staring at him shrewdly, "did I not hear you come in at two o'clock, Allen?"

"Yes, sir," Allen always addressed his parent in this stiff fashion. "I was unavoidably late'

Mrs Hill cast an anxious look at his face, and her husband hushed his claret before making any reply Then he spoke, folding up his napkin as he did so "When I gave you a latch-key," said Mr Hill in his deep, rich voice, "I did not expect it to be used after midnight Even the gayest of young men should be in bed before that unholy hour."

"I wasn't very gay," said Allen listlessly, "the fact is, father, I sprained my ankle last night four miles away"

"In what direction?"

"The Westhaven direction I was going to the Red Deeps, and while going I twisted my ankle I lay on the moor—I was half way across when I fell—for a long time waiting for help As none came, I managed to crawl home, and so reached here at two I came on all fours"

'Humph," said Hill, "it's lucky Wasp didn't see you With his ideas of duty he would have run you in for being drunk"

"I think I could have convinced Wasp to the contrary," said Allen drily, "my mother bathed my ankle, and it is easier this morning"

'But you should not have come down to breakfast," said Mrs Hill

"It would have put my father out, had I not come, mother"

'Quite so," said Mr. Hill, "I am glad to hear that you try to behave as a son Besides self-denial makes a man," added Mr Hill, who never denied himself anything "Strange, Allen, I did not notice that you limped—and I am an observant man"

"I was seated here before you came down," his son reminded him

"True,' said Mr Hill, rising; "it is one of my late mornings I was dreaming of an opera I intend, Allen, to compose an opera Saccharissa," thus he addressed Mrs Hill, who was called plain Sarah, "do you hear? I intend to immortalise myself."

"I hear," said Saccharissa, quite unmoved She had heard before, of these schemes to immortalise Mr Hill

"I shall call my opera 'Gwendoline,'" said Mr Hill, passing his hand through his hair "it will be a Welsh opera I don't think any one has ever composed a Welsh opera, Allen"

"I can't call one to mind, sir," said Allen, his eyes on his plate

"The opening chorus," began Mr Hill, full of his theme, "will be — —"

"One moment, sir, interrupted Allen, who was not in the mood for this trifling, "I want to ask you a question"

"No! no! no! You will disturb the current of my thoughts Would you have the world lose a masterpiece, Allen?"

"It is a very simple question sir Will you see Mr Strode to-day?"

Hill, who was looking out of the window and humming a theme for his opening chorus, turned sharply "Certainly not I am occupied"

"Mr Strode is your oldest and best friend," urged Allen

"He has proved that by taking money from me," said Hill, with a deep laugh "Why should I see him?"

"I want you to put in a good word for me and Eva Of course," Allen raised his eyes abruptly and looked directly at his father "you expected to see him this morning?"

"No, I didn't,' snapped the composer "Strode and I were friends at school and college, certainly, but we met rarely in after life The last time I saw him was when he brought his wife down here"

"Poor Lady Jane,' sighed Mrs Hill who was seated with folded hands

"You may well say that, Saccharissa She was wedded to a clown——"

"I thought Mr. Strode was a clever and cultured man," said Allen dryly

"He should have been,' said Mr Hill, waving his hand and then sticking it into the breast of his shirt "I did my best to form him But flowers will not grow in clay, and Strode was made of stodgy clay A poor creature, and very quarrelsome"

"That doesn't sound like stodgy clay, sir"

"He varied, Allen, he varied At times the immortal fire he buried in his unfruitful soil would leap out at my behest, but for the most part Strode was an uncultured yokel The lambent flame of my fancy, my ethereal fancy, played on the mass harmlessly, or with small result I could not submit to be bound even by friendship to such a clod, so I got rid of Strode And how did I do it? I lent him two thousand pounds, and not being able to repay it, shame kept him away Cheap at the price — cheap at the price Allen, how does this theme strike you for an opening chorus of Druids—modern Druids, of course? The scene is at Anglesea ——'

'Wait, father You hinted the other morning that Mr Strode would never come back to Wargrove

"Did I? said Mr Hill in an airy manner, "I forget"

"What grounds had you to say that?"

"Grounds—oh, my dear Allen, are you so commonplace as to demand grounds? I forgot my train of thought just then—the fancy has vanished but I am sure that my grounds were such as you would not understand Why do you ask?"

"I may as well be frank," began Allen, when his father stopped him

"No It is so obvious to be frank And to-day I am in an enigmatic mood —music is an enigma, and therefore I wish to be mysterious"

"I may as well be frank," repeated Allen doggedly, and doggedness was the only way to meet such a trifler as Mr Hill "I saw Eva last night, and she related a dream she had"

"Ah!" Mr Hill spun round vivaciously—"now you talk sense I love the psychic A dream! Can Eva dream?—such a matter-of-fact girl"

"Indeed she's no such thing, sir," said the indignant lover

"Pardon me. You are not a reader of character as I am Eva Strode at present possesses youth, to cover a commonplace soul When she gets old and the soul works through the mask of the face, she will be a common-looking woman like your mother"

"Oh!" said Allen, at this double insult But Mrs Hill laid her hand on his arm, and the touch quietened him It was useless to be angry with so irresponsible a creature as Mr Hill "I must tell you the dream," said Allen with an effort, "and then you can judge if Eva is what you say"

"I wait for the dream, replied Mr Hill waving his arm airily, "but it will not alter my opinion She is commonplace, that is why I agreed to your engagement You are commonplace also—you take after your mother"

Mrs Hill rose quite undisturbed "I had better go, she said

"By all means Sacharissa, said Hill graciously, "to-day in my music mood I am a butterfly You disturb me Life with me must be sunshine this day, but you are a creature of gloom"

"Wait a moment, mother" said Allen, catching Mrs Hill's hand as she moved quietly to the door, "I want you to hear Eva's dream"

"Which certainly will not be worth listening to, said the butterfly Allen passed over this fresh piece of insolence, although he secretly wondered how his mother took such talk calmly He recounted the dream in detail "So I went to the Red Deeps at Eva's request," he finished, "to see if her dream was true I never thought it would be, of course, but I went to pacify her But when I left the road to take a short cut to the Red Deeps, about four miles from Wargrove, I twisted my ankle, as I said, and after waiting crawled home, to arrive here at two o'clock"

"Why do you tell me this dream—which is interesting, I admit?" asked Mr Hill irritably, and with a rather dark face

"Because you said that Mr Strode would never come home Eva's dream hinted at the same thing Why did you——?"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Mr Hill, sitting down with a smile "I will endeavour to recall my mood when I spoke" He thought for a few minutes, then touched his forehead "The mood taps here," said he playfully "Allen, my son, you don't know Strode, I do A truculent ruffian, determined to have money at any cost"

"I always heard he was a polished gentleman," objected Allen

"Oh, quite so The public school life and university polish gave him manners for society I don't deny that But when you scratched the skin, the swashbuckler broke out Do you know how he came to lose his right hand, Allen? No I could tell you that, but the story is too long, and my brain is not in its literary vein this day If I could sing it, I would, but the theme is prosaic Well, to come to the point, Allen, Strode, though a gentleman, is a swashbuckler Out in Africa he has been trying to make money, and has done so at the cost of making enemies"

"Who told you so?"

"Let me see—oh his lawyer, who is also mine In fact, I introduced him to Mask, my solicitor I went up a few months ago to see Mask about some business, and asked after Strode, for though the man is a baron of the middle ages and a ruffian, still he is my friend Mask told me that Strode was making money and enemies at the same time When you informed me, Allen, that Strode was coming home in the *Dunoon Castle*, and that he had arrived at Southampton, I thought some of his enemies might have followed him, and might have him arrested for swindling In that case, he certainly would not arrive"

"But how do you know that Mr Strode would swindle?"

"Because he was a man with no moral principles,' retorted Mr Hill, "your mother here will tell you the same"

"I did not like Mr Strode," said Mrs Hill calmly, "he was not what I call a good man Eva takes after Lady Jane, who was always a delightful friend to me I was glad to hear you were engaged to the dear girl, Allen," she added, and patted his hand.

"It is strange that your observation and Eva's dream should agree'

"Pardon me,' said Mr Hill, rising briskly, "they do *not* agree I suggested just now that Strode might be followed by his Cape Town enemies and arrested for swindling Eva dreamed that he was dead"

"Then you don't agree with her dream?" asked Allen, puzzled

"Interesting, I admit, but—oh no" —Hill shrugged his shoulders— "Strode can look after himself. Whosoever is killed, he will be safe enough I never knew a man possessed of such infernal ingenuity Well, are you satisfied? If not, ask me more, and I'll explain what I can Ah, by the way, there's Wasp coming up the garden" Hill threw open the window and hailed the policeman "I asked Wasp to come and see me, Allen, whenever he had an interesting case to report I intend to write a volume on the physiology of the criminal classes. Probably Wasp, wishing to earn an honest penny, has come to tell me some paltry crime not worth expending five shillings on—that's his price Ah, Wasp, what is it?"

The policeman, a stout little man, saluted "Death, sir"

"How interesting," said Mr Hill, rubbing his hands "this is indeed news worth five shillings. Death?"

"Murder."

Allen rose and looked wide-eyed at the policeman. "Mr Strode?"

"Yes, Sir Mr. Strode Murdered —found dead at the Red Deeps"

"Face downward in the mud?" whispered Allen. "Oh, the dream— the dream!" and he sank back in his chair quite overwhelmed

"You seem to know all about it, Mr. Allen," said Wasp, with sudden suspicion

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE LOSS

Wasp was a bulky little man with a great opinion of his own importance In early years he had been in the army, and there, had imbibed stern ideas of duty Shortly after joining the police force he was sent to Warsgrove, and, with an underling, looked after the village and the surrounding district Married while young, he now possessed a family of ten, who dwelt with Mrs Wasp in a spick and-span house on the verge of the common Everything about Wasp's house was spotless The little policeman had drilled his wife so thoroughly, that she performed her duties in quite a military way, and thought Wasp the greatest of men mentally, whatever he may have been physically The ten children were also drilled to perfection, and life in the small house was conducted on garrison lines The family woke early to the sound of the bugle, and retired to bed when "Lights out was sounded It was quite a model household, especially as on Sunday Wasp, a fervid churchman, walked at the head of his olive-branches with Mrs Wasp to St Peter's church

The pay was not very large, but Wasp managed to make money in many ways Lately he had been earning stray crowns from Mr. Hill by detailing any case which he thought likely to interest his patron Hitherto these had been concerned with thieving and drunkenness and poaching—things which Mr Hill did not care about But on this occasion Wasp came to "The Arabian Nights" swelling with importance, knowing that he had a most exciting story to tell. He was therefore not

at all pleased when Allen, so to speak, took the words out of his official mouth His red face grew redder than ever, and he drew up his stiff little figure to its full height, which was not much "You seem to know all about it, Mr Allen," said Wasp tartly

"It is certainly strange that Miss Strode should dream as she did," said Hill, who had turned a trifle pale, "what do you think, Sacharissa?"

Mrs Hill quoted from her husband's favourite poet "'There are more things in heaven and earth—'

"That's poetry, we want sense," said Hill interrupting testily, "my muse mood has been banished by this news I now feel that I am equal to being a Vidocq Allen henceforth I am a detective until the murderer of my friend Strode is in the dock Where is the criminal," added Hill turning to the policeman, "that I may see him?"

"No one knows who did it, sir," said Wasp, eyeing Allen suspiciously

"What are the circumstances?"

"Mr Allen your son here, seems to know all about them," said Wasp stiffly

Allen, who was resting his head on the white cloth of the table, looked up slowly His face seemed old and worn and the dark circles under his eyes were more marked than ever "Didn't Miss Strode tell you her dream, Wasp?" he asked

The policeman snorted "I've got too much to do in connection with this case to think of them rubbishy things, sir, said he, "Mrs Merry did say something, now you mention it But how's a man woke up to dooty at one in the morning to listen to dreams?"

"Were you woke at one o'clock, Wasp?" asked Mr Hill, settling himself luxuriously, "tell me the details, and then I will go with you to see Miss Strode and the remains of one, whom I always regarded as a friend, whatever his shortcomings might have been Allen, I suppose you will remain within and nurse your foot"

"No," said Allen rising painfully "I must see Eva"

"Have you hurt your foot, sir?" asked Wasp, who was paying particular attention to Allen

"Yes I sprained it last night," said Allen shortly

"Where, may I ask, sir?"

"On Chilvers Common"

"Ho!" Wasp stroked a ferocious moustache he wore for the sake of impressing evil-doers, "that's near the Red Deeps?"

"About a mile from the Red Deeps, I believe" said Allen, trying to ease the pain of his foot by resting it

"And what were you doing there, may I ask sir?"

This time it was not Allen who replied, but his mother The large, lean woman suddenly flushed and her stolid face became alive with anger She turned on the little man—well named Wasp from his meddlesome disposition and desire to sting when he could—and seemed like a tigress protecting her cub "Why do you ask?" she demanded "do you hint that my son has anything to do with this matter?"

"No, I don't, ma'am," replied Wasp coldly, "but Mr Allen talked of the corp being found face downward in the mud We did find it so—leastways them as found the dead, saw it that way How did Mr Al——"

"The dream, my good Wasp," interposed Hill angrily "Miss Strode dreamed a dream two nights ago, and thought she saw her father dead in the Red Deeps, face downward She also heard a laugh—but that's a detail My son told us of the dream before you came It is strange it should be verified so soon and so truly I begin to think that Miss Strode has imagination after all Without imagination," added the little man impressively, "no one can dream I speak on the authority of Coleridge, a poet," he

smiled pityingly on the three—"of whom you probably know nothing"

"Poets ain't in the case," said Wasp, "and touching Mr Allen——"

The younger engineer stood up for himself "My story is short," he said, "and you may not believe it, Wasp"

"Why shouldn't I?" demanded the policeman very suspiciously

Allen shrugged his shoulders "You have not imagination enough, he answered, copying his father, "it seems to me that you believe I am concerned in this matter"

"There ain't no need to incriminate yourself, sir"

"Spare me the warning I am not going to do so If you want to know the truth it is this Miss Strode dreamed the other night that her father was lying dead in the Red Deeps After vainly endeavouring to laugh her out of the belief that the dream was true, I went last night to the Red Deeps to convince her that all was well I struck across the moor from the high road, and catching my foot in some bramble bushes I twisted my ankle I could not move, and my ankle grew very painful For hours I waited, on the chance that some one might come past, but Chulvers Common being lonely, as you know, I could not get help Therefore, shortly before midnight—though I can hardly tell the exact time, my watch having been stopped when I fell—I managed to crawl home I arrived about two o'clock, and my mother was waiting up for me She bathed my ankle and I went to bed"

"It couldn't have been very bad, sir, if you're down now," said Wasp bluntly, and only half satisfied with Allen's explanation

"I forced myself to come down, as my father does not like any one to be absent from meals," was the reply

"Right, Mr Wasp—right," said Hill briskly, "you need not go on suspecting my son He has nothing to do with this matter, the more so as he is engaged to Miss Strode."

"And I certainly should end all my chances of marrying Miss Strode by killing her father," said Allen sharply, "I think you take too much upon yourself, Wasp"

The policeman excused himself on the plea of zeal, but saw that he had gone too far, and offered an apology "But it was your knowing the position of the body that made me doubtful," he said

"That is the dream," said Mrs Hill quietly "but you can now tell us all that has taken place"

Hill looked astonished at his wife and a trifle annoyed She was not usually given to putting herself forward—as he called it—but wanted to take her time from him He would have interposed and asked the question himself, so as to recover the lead in his own house, but that Wasp, anxious to atone for his late error, replied at once, and addressed himself exclusively to Mrs Hill

"Well, m'am, it's this way," he said, drawing himself up stiffly and saluting apologetically I was wakened about one o'clock by a message that I was wanted at Misery Castle, an queer name as you know, ma'am—

"We all know about Mrs Merry and her eccentricities," said Mrs Hill, who, having an eccentric person in the house, was lenient towards the failings of others, "go on"

"Well, ma'am, Jackson, who is under me, was at the other end of the village before midnight, but coming past Misery Castle on his rounds he saw Mrs Merry waiting at the gate She said that Mr Strode had been brought home dead by three men—labourers They, under the direction of Miss Eva, took the body in and laid it on a bed Then Miss Eva sent them away with money That was just about twelve o'clock The men should have come to report to me, or have seen Jackson, but they went back to their own homes beyond the common, Westhaven way I'm going to ask them what they

mean by doing that and not reporting to the police," said Wasp sourly "Well then, ma'am, Jackson saw the body and reported to me at one in the morning I put on my uniform and went to Misery Castle I examined the remains and called up Jackson We made a report of the condition of the body, and sent it by messenger to Westhaven The inspector came this morning and is now at Misery Castle Being allowed to go away for a spell having been on duty all night over the body, I came here to tell Mr Hill, knowing he'd like to hear of the murder"

"I am glad you came," said Hill, rubbing his hands, "a fine murder, though," his face fell, "I had rather it had been any one but my old friend I suppose you don't know how he came by his death?"

"He was shot, sir"

"Shot?" echoed Allen, looking up, "and by whom?"

"I can't say, nor can any one, Mr Allen From what Mrs Merry says, and she asked questions of those who brought the body home, the corp was found lying face downward in the mud near the Red Deeps spring Why he should have gone there—the dead man, I mean, sir I can't say I hear he was coming from London, and no doubt he'd drive in a fly to Wargrove But we'll have to make inquiries at the office of the railway station, and get to facts Some one must hang for it"

"Don't, Wasp, you're making my mother ill," said Allen quickly

And indeed Mrs Hill looked very white But she rallied herself and smiled quietly in her old manner "I knew Mr Strode," she said, "and I feel his sad end keenly, especially as he has left a daughter behind him Poor Eva," she added, turning to Allen, "she is now an orphan"

"All the more reason that I should make her my wife and cherish her," said Allen quickly "I'll go to the cottage," he looked at his father "may I take the pony chaise?—my foot——"

"I was thinking of going myself," said Hill hesitatingly, "but as you are engaged to the girl, it is right you should go I'll drive you" Allen looked dubious. Mr Hill thought he could drive in the same way that he fancied he could do all things but he was not a good whip, and Allen did not want another accident to happen However, he resolved to risk the journey, and, thanking his father, went out of the room While the chaise was getting ready, Allen, looking out of the window, saw his father leave the grounds in the company of Wasp Apparently both were going to Misery Castle He turned to his mother who was in the room "What about my father driving?" he asked "I see he has left the house"

"Probably he has forgotten," said Mrs Hill soothingly, "you know how forgetful and whimsical he is"

"Do I not?" said Allen with a sigh, "and don't you?" he added, smiling at the dark face of his mother "Well, I can drive myself Will you come also, mother, and comfort Eva?"

"Not just now I think that is your task She is fond of me, but at present you can do her more good And I think, Allen," said Mrs Hill, "that you might bring her back It is terrible that a young girl should be left alone in that small cottage with so dismal a woman as Mrs. Merry Bring her back"

"But my father?"

"I'll make it right with him," said Mrs Hill determinedly.

Allen looked at her anxiously His mother had a firm, dark face, with quiet eyes steady and unwavering in their gaze It had often struck him as wonderful, how so strong a woman—apparently—should allow his shallow father to rule the house On several occasions, as he knew, Mrs Hill had asserted herself firmly, and then Hill, after much outward anger, had given way There was a mystery about this, and on any other occasion Allen would

her, the door opened abruptly and Hill entered rather excited "Eva," he said quickly, "you never told me that your father's wooden hand had been removed."

"It has not been," said Eva, "it was on when we laid out his body"

"It's gone now then," said Hill quietly, and looking very pale, "gone"

CHAPTER VI

THE WARNING

On hearing this announcement of the loss, Eva rose and went to the chamber of death There, under a sheet lay the body of her father looking far more calm in death than he had ever looked in life But the sheet was disarranged on the right side, and lifting this slightly, she saw that what Mr Hill said was true The wooden hand had been removed, and now there remained but the stump of the arm A glance round the room showed her that the window was open, but she remembered opening it herself The blind was down, but some one might have entered and thieved from the dead It was an odd loss, and Eva could not think why it should have taken place

When she returned to the tiny drawing-room Allen and his father were in deep conversation They looked up when the girl entered

"It is quite true" said Eva sitting down "the hand is gone

"Who can have stolen it?" demanded Allen, wrinkling his brow

"And why should it be stolen?" asked Hill pointedly

Eva pressed her hands to her aching head "I don't know," she said wearily "When Mrs Merry and I laid out the body at dawn this morning the hand was certainly there, for I noted the white glove all discoloured with the mud of the Red Deeps We pulled down the blind and opened the window Some one may have entered."

"But why should some one steal?" said Hill uneasily, "you say the hand was there at dawn?"

"Yes" Eva rose and rang the bell "We can ask Mrs Merry"

The old woman speedily entered, and expressed astonishment at the queer loss "The hand was there at nine," she said positively "I went to see if everything was well, and lifted the sheet Ah, dear me, Mr Strode, as was, put a new white glove on that wooden hand every morning, so that it might look nice and clean Whatever would he have said, to see the glove all red with clay? I intended," added Mrs Merry, "to have put on a new glove, and I sent Cain to buy it"

"What?" asked Eva, looking up "is Cain back?"

"Yes, deary He came early, as the circus is passing through this place on to the next town, Shanton Cain thought he'd pick up the canvas on the road, so came to say good-bye"

Eva remembered Cain's odd behaviour, and wondered if he had anything to do with the theft But the idea was ridiculous The lad was bad enough, but he certainly would not rob the dead Moreover—on the face of it—there was no reason he should steal so useless an object as a wooden hand What with the excitement of the death, and the fulfilment of the dream, not to mention that she felt a natural grief for the death of her father, the poor girl was quite worn out Mr Hill saw this, and after questioning Mrs. Merry as to the theft of the glove, he went away

"I shall see Wasp about this," he said, pausing at the door, "there must be some meaning in the theft Meanwhile I'll examine the flower-bed outside the window"

Mrs Merry went with him, but neither could see any sign of footmarks on the soft mould The thief —if indeed a thief had entered the house, had jumped the flower-bed,

and no marks were discoverable on the hard gravel of the path "There's that boy," said Mrs Merry

"What boy?" asked Hill, starting.

"A little rascal, as calls himself Butsey," said the old woman, folding her hands as usual under her apron "London street brat I take him to be He came to say Cain would be here to-morrow"

"But Cain is here to-day," said Mr Hill perplexed

"That's what makes me think Butsey might have stolen the wooden hand," argued Mrs Merry "Why should he come here else? I didn't tell him, as Cain had already arrived, me being one as knows how to hold my tongue whatever you may say, Mr Hills" so Mrs Merry named her companion "I would have asked questions but the boy slipped I wonder why he stole it?"

"You have no proof that he stole it at all said Hill smartly "but I'll tell Wasp what you say When does the inquest take place?"

"To-morrow, as you might say," snapped Mrs Merry crossly, "and don't bring that worrying Wasp round here, Mr Hills Wasp he is by name and Wasp by nature with his questions If ever you- -"

But Mr Hill was beyond hearing by this time He always avoided a chat with Mrs Merry as the shrillness of her voice so he explained — annoyed him The old woman stared after his retreating figure and she shook her head "You're a bad one," she soliloquised, "him as is dead was bad too A pair of ye -ah—but if there's trouble coming as trouble will come, do what you may—Miss Eva shan't suffer while I can stop any worrying"

Meanwhile Eva and Allen were talking seriously "My dream was fulfilled in the strangest way, Allen," the girl said "I dreamed, as I told you, the night before last at nine o'clock ——"

"Well?" questioned the young man, seeing she hesitated.

Eva looked round fearfully "The doctor says, that, judging by the condition of the body, my father must have been shot at that hour"

"Last night you mean," said Allen hesitatingly

"No This is Friday He was shot on Wednesday at nine, and the body must have lain all those long hours at the Red Deeps Of course," added Eva quickly, "no one goes to the Red Deeps It was the merest chance that those labourers went last night and found the body So you see, Allen, my father must have been killed at the very time I dreamed of his death"

"It is strange," said young Hill, much perturbed "I wonder who can have killed him?"

Eva shook her head "I cannot say not can any one The inspector from Westhaven has been here this morning making inquiries, but, of course, I can tell him nothing except about the telegram"

"What telegram?"

"Didn't I mention it to you?" said the girl, raising her eyes which were fixed on the ground disconsolately, "no -- of course I didn't It came after you left me -- at nine o'clock— no, it was at half-past nine The wire was from my father, saying he would be down the next day It had arrived at Westhaven at four, and should have been delivered earlier but for the forgetfulness of the messenger"

"But, Eva, if the wire came from your father yesterday, he could not have been shot on Wednesday night"

"No, I can't understand it I told Inspector Garrit about the wire, and he took it away with him He will say all that he learns about the matter at the inquest to-morrow And now my father's wooden hand has been stolen —it is strange"

"Very strange," assented Allen musingly He was thinking of what his father had said about Mr Strode's probable enemies "Eva, do you know if your father brought any

jewels from Africa—diamonds, I mean?"

"I can't say. No diamonds were found on his body. In fact, his purse was filled with money and his jewellery had not been taken."

"The robbery could not have been the motive for the crime."

"No, Allen, the body was not robbed." She rose and paced the room. "I can't understand my dream. I wonder if, when I slept, my soul went to the Red Deeps and saw the crime committed."

"You did not see the crime committed?"

"No. I saw the body, however, lying in the position in which it was afterwards found by Jacobs and the others. And then the laugh—that cruel laugh—as though the assassin was gloating over his cruel work—the man who murdered my father was laughing in my dream."

"How can you tell it was a man?"

"The laugh sounded like that of a man."

"In your dream? I don't think a jury will take that evidence."

Eva stopped before the young man and looked at him determinedly. "I don't see why that part of my dream should not come true if the other has already been proved true. It's all of a piece."

To this remark young Hill had no answer ready. Certainly the dream had come true in one part, so why not in another? But he was too anxious about Eva's future to continue the discussion. "What about you, darling?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied, and sat down beside him again. "I can think of nothing until the inquest has taken place. When I learn who has killed my father, I shall be more at ease."

"That is only right and natural, but——"

"Don't mistake me, Allen," she interrupted vehemently. "I saw so little of my father, and, through my mother, knew so much bad about him, that I don't mourn his death as a daughter ought to. But I feel that I have a duty to perform. I must learn who killed him, and have that person sent to the scaffold."

Allen coloured and looked down. "We can talk about that when we have further facts before us. Inspector Garrit, you say, is making inquiries?"

"Yes, I have given him the telegram, and also the address of my father's lawyer, which I found in a letter in his pocket."

"Mr. Mask?"

"Yes, Sebastian Mask. do you know him?"

"I know of him. He is my father's lawyer also, and so became Mr. Strode's man of business. Yes, it is just as well Garrit should see him. When your father arrived in London he probably went to see Mask, to talk over business. We might learn something in that quarter."

"Learn what?" asked Eva bluntly.

Allen did not answer at once. "Eva," he said after a pause, "do you remember I told you that my father said Mr. Strode might not arrive? Well, I asked him why he said so, and he declared that from what he knew of your father, Mr. Strode was a man likely to have many enemies. It struck me that this crime may be the work of one of those enemies. Now Mask knowing all your father's business, may also know about those who wished him ill."

"It may be so," said Eva reflectively, "my father, from what Mrs. Merry says, was a most quarrelsome man, and would stop at nothing to make money. He doubtless made enemies in Africa as your father suggests, but why should an enemy follow him to England to kill him? It would have been easier to shoot him in Africa."

Allen shrugged his shoulders. "It's all theory on our parts," he said. "We don't know yet if Mr.

of Mr Strode Although he belonged to the old family of the neighbourhood, and should have lived in the manor as the lord of the village, he had been absent from Wargrove for so long, that few people were well acquainted with him Some ancient villagers remembered him as a gay, sky-larking young man, when with Mr Hill the two had played pranks during vacation Then came the death of the old squire and the sale of the manor by his son At times Strode had come to Wargrove with his wife, and at Misery Castle Eva had been born But he usually stopped only a short time, as the slow life of the country wearied his restless spirit But always, when he came to his old haunts, he went to look at the home of his race Every one knew that it was his desire to be Strode of Wargrove again, in fact as well as in name

Many people remembered him when he came to Wargrove for the last time, to place his wife and daughter under the roof of Mrs Merry Strode had always been stiff and cold in manner but, being of the old stock, this behaviour was esteemed right, as no lord of the soil should be too familiar, the wiseacres thought "A proud, haughty gentleman" said some, "but then he's a right to be proud Ain't the Strodes been here since the Conquest? 'Tis a wonder he took up with that Mr Hill, whose father was but a stockbroker

So it will be guessed that Strode's return to his native place to meet with a violent death at unknown hands, created much excitement The jury surveyed the body in Misery Castle, and then went to the one inn of the village to hear the evidence A few people were in the coffee-room where the proceedings took place, but Inspector Garrit gave orders that the crowd should be kept out The street, therefore, was filled with people talking of Strode and of his terrible end One old man, who had seen eighty summers, gave it as his opinion, that it was no wonder Mr Strode had died so

"And what do you mean by that?" asked Wasp, who, full of importance, was making things unpleasant with over-zeal

The ancient pulled his cap to the majesty of the law. "Whoy," said he, chewing a straw, "Muster Robert —by which I means Muster Strode— was a powerful angery gent surely He gied I a clip on th' 'ead when I was old enough to be his father, though to be sure 'twas in his collegin days Ah, I mind them two well!"

"What two?" asked Wasp, on the alert to pick up evidence

"Muster Strode as was, an' Muster Hill as is They be very horty-torty in them days, not as 'twasn't right fur Muster Robert, he being laid an' master of the village But Muster Hill" the ancient spat out the straw to show his contempt "Lard, he be nothin'!"

"He's very rich, Granfer"

"What's money to blood? Muster Strode shouldn't ha taken him up, and given he upsettin' notions He an' Giles Merry ran away from his wife, and Muster Strode, ah them did make things lively like"

"I don't see what this has to do with the death," said Wasp snappishly

"Never you mind, said Granfer, valiant through over-much beer "I knows what I knows Muster Robert – 'twas a word an' a blow with him and when he clips me on the 'ead, I ses 'Sir, 'tis a red end as you'll come to,' and my words have come true He've bin shot"

"And who shot him?" asked the blacksmith

"One of em as he clipped on the 'ead same as he did me," said Granfer

Wasp dismissed this piece of gossip with contempt, and entered the coffee-room to watch proceedings The little policeman was very anxious to bring the murderer to justice, in the hopes that he would be rewarded for his zeal by a post at Westhaven Hitherto he had found nothing likely to lead to any discovery, and Inspector Garrit had not been communicative So, stand

ing stiffly at the lower end of the room, Wasp listened with all his red ears to the evidence, to see what he could gain therefrom likely to set him on the track. A chance like this was not to be wasted, and Wasp's family was very large, with individual appetites to correspond.

Eva was present, with Allen on one side of her and Mrs Palmer on the other. Behind sat Mrs Merry, smiling because Mrs Palmer was offering Eva her smelling bottle. The widow was blonde and lively, well dressed, of a most cheerful disposition. Her father certainly had been a cheerist, but he had left her money. Her husband undoubtedly had been an egg and butter merchant, but he also had left her well off. Mrs Palmer had been born and brought up in Shanton and her late husband's shop had been in Westhaven. Therefore she lived at neither place now that she was free and rich, but fixed her abode at Wargrove, midway between the two towns. She went out a good deal and spent her money freely. But she never could get amongst the county families as was her ambition. Perhaps her liking for Eva Strode was connected with the fact that the girl was of aristocratic birth. With the Lord of the Manor—as he should have been—for a father, and an Earl's daughter for a mother, Eva was as well-born as any one in the county. But apart from her birth, Mrs Palmer, kindly and genial, really liked the girl for her own sake. And Eva also was fond of the merry, pretty widow, although Mrs Merry quite disapproved of the friendship.

Inspector Garrit was present, and beside him sat a lean, yellow-faced man, who looked like a lawyer and was one. He had presented himself at the cottage that very morning as Mr Mask, the solicitor of the deceased, and had been brought down by Garrit to give evidence as to the movements of Mr Strode in town, since his arrival from Africa. Eva had asked him about her future, but he declined to say anything until the verdict of the jury was given. When this matter was settled, and when Strode was laid in the family vault beside his neglected wife, Mask said that he would call at Misery Castle and explain.

The case was opened by Garrit, who detailed the facts and what evidence he had gathered to support them. "The deceased gentleman," said Garrit, who was stout and short of breath, "came to Southampton from South Africa at the beginning of August, a little over a week ago. He had been in South Africa for five years. After stopping two days at Southampton at the Ship Inn, the deceased had come to London and had taken up his quarters in the Guelph Hotel, Jermyn Street. He went to the theatres and wrote to his tailors for a new outfit, and called on his lawyer, Mr Mask, who would give evidence. On Wednesday last, the deceased wired from London that he would be down at eight o'clock on Thursday evening. The wire was sent to Miss Strode, and was taken from the hotel by the porter who sent it, from the St James's telegraph office."

"Why are you so precise about this telegram?" asked the coroner.

"I shall explain later, sir," panted Garrit, wiping his face, for it was hot in the coroner's room. "Well then, gentlemen of the jury, the deceased changed his mind, as I learned from inquiries at the hotel. He came down on Wednesday evening instead of Thursday, and arrived at the Westhaven station at six-thirty."

"That was the train he intended to come by on Thursday?" asked a juryman.

"Certainly. He changed the day but not the train."

"Didn't he send another wire to Miss Strode notifying his change of plan?"

"No. He sent no wire saying he would be down on Wednesday. Perhaps he desired to give Miss Strode a pleasant surprise. At all events, Miss Strode did not expect him till Thurs-

day night at eight She will give evidence to that effect Well, gentlemen of the jury, the deceased arrived at Westhaven by the six-thirty train on Wednesday, consequent on his change of plan He left the greater part of his luggage at the Guelph Hotel, and came only with a small bag, from which it would seem that he intended to stop only for the night As the bag was easily carried, Mr Strode decided to walk over - '

"But if he arrived by the six-thirty he would not get to the cottage at eight, said a juryman

"No I can't say why he walked - it's ten miles A quick walker could do the distance in two hours but Mr Strode not being so young as he was, was not a quick walker At all events, he walked A porter who offered to take his bag, and was snubbed, was the last person who saw him '

"Didn't any one see him on the road to Wargrove ?"

"I can't say As yet I have found no one who saw him Besides, Mr Strode did not keep to the road all the time He walked along it for some distance and then struck across Chilvers Common, to go to the Red Deeps Whether he intended to go there,' added the inspector, wiping his face again, I can't say But he was found there dead on Thursday night by three men, Arnold, Jacobs, and Wake These found a card in the pocket giving the name of the deceased, and one of them Jacobs, then recognised the body as that of Mr Strode whom he had seen five years previous The men took the body to the cottage and then went home"

"Why didn't they inform the police ?" asked the coroner

Garrit stole a glance at Wasp and suppressed a smile "They will tell you that themselves, sir" he said "however, Mrs Merry found the policeman Jackson on his rounds late at night, and he went to tell Mr Wasp, a most zealous officer I came over next morning The doctor had examined the body, and will now give his evidence"

After this witness retired, Dr Grace appeared, and deposed that he had been called in to examine the body of the deceased The unfortunate gentleman had been shot through the heart, and must have been killed instantaneously There was also a flesh wound on the upper part of the right arm, here the doctor produced a bullet "This I extracted from the body, gentlemen, but the other bullet cannot be found It must have merely ripped the flesh of the arm, and then have buried itself in the trees'

'This bullet caused the death ?" asked the coroner

"Certainly It passed through the heart I expect the assassin fired twice, and missing his victim at the first shot fired again with a surer aim From the nature of the wound in the arm, gentlemen,' added Grace, "I am inclined to think that the deceased had his back to the assassin The first bullet the lost one, mind—skimmed along the flesh of the arm The pain would make the deceased turn sharply to face the assassin, whereupon the second shot was fired and passed through the heart I think from the condition of the body, that the murder was committed at nine o'clock on Wednesday night Mr Strode may have gone to the Red Deeps to meet the assassin, and thus have '

This isn't evidence," interrupted the coroner abruptly ' you can sit down, Dr Grace"

This the doctor did, rather annoyed, for he was fond of hearing himself chatter The three labourers, Arnold, Wake, and Jacobs, followed, and stated that they went to the Red Deeps to get a drink from the spring It was about half-past ten when they found the body It was lying near the spring, face downwards They took it up and from a card learned it was that of Mr Strode Then they took it to the cottage and went home

"Why didn't you inform the police?" a juryman asked Jacobs

"The big man scratched his head and looked sheepish "Well, you see, sir, policeman Wasp's a sharp one, he is, and like as not he'd have thought we'd killed the gent We all three thought as we'd wait till we could see some other gentleman like yourself"

There was a smile at this, and Wasp grew redder than he was "A trifle too much zeal on the part of policeman Wasp" said the coroner dryly, "but you should have given notice You carried the body home between you, I suppose?"

"Yes There was Arnold, myself, and Wake then there was the b ," added the witness with hesitation

"Boy?" questioned the coroner sharply, "what boy?"

Jacobs scratched his head again "I dunno sir A boy joined us on the edge of the common near Wargrove, and, boy-like, when he saw we'd a corpse he followed When we dropped the body at the door of Misery Castle"—the name of Mrs Merry's abode provoked a smile—"the boy said as he'd knock He knocked five times"

"Why five times?" questioned a juryman, while Eva started

"I can't say, sir But knock five times he did, and then ran away"

"What kind of a boy was he?"

"Just an ordinary boy sir," grunted the witness "save that he seemed sharp He'd a white face and a lot of red hair—"

"Lor!" cried Mrs Merry, interrupting the proceedings, "it's Butsey"

"Do you know the boy?" asked the coroner "Come and give your evidence, Mrs Merry"

The old woman, much excited, kissed the book "Know the boy?" she said in her doleful voice "Lord bless you, Mr. Shakerley that being your name, sir, I don't know the boy from a partridge But on Friday morning he came to me, and told me as Cain—my boy, gentlemen, and a wicked boy at that—would come and see me Saturday As Cain was in the house, gentlemen, leastways as I'd sent him for a glove for the wooden hand of the corp, the boy—Butsey, he said his name was—told a lie, which don't astonish me, seeing what boys are I think he was a London boy, being sharp and ragged But he just told the lie, and before I could clout his head for falsehoods, he skipped away"

"Have you seen him since?"

"No, I am't," said Mrs Merry, "and when I do I'll clout him, I will"

"Does your son know him?"

"That he don't For I asked Cain why he told the boy to speak such a falsehood seeing there was no need But Cain said he'd told no one to say as he was coming, and that he intended to see me Friday and no Saturday, as that lying boy spoke"

Here Inspector Grant rose, and begged that Miss Strode might be called, as she could tell something, bearing on the boy Eva looked somewhat astonished, as she had not seen Butsey However, she was sworn and duly gave her evidence

"My father came home from South Africa over a week ago in the *Dunoon Castle* He wrote to me from Southampton saying he would be down He then went to London and stopped there a week He did not write from London but sent two telegrams"

"Two telegrams, said the coroner "One on Wednesday——"

"Yes," said the witness, "and one on Thursday night"

"But that's impossible He was dead then, according to the medical evidence"

"That's what I cannot understand," said Eva, glancing at the inspector "I expected him on Thursday night at eight and had dinner ready for him After waiting till after nine I was about to go to bed when a telegraph messenger arrived He gave me the wire and said it arrived at four, and should have been sent then It was from my father, saying he had post

poned his departure till the next day, Friday I thought it was all right and went to bed About twelve I was awakened by the five knocks of my dream——"

"What do you mean by your dream, Miss Strode?"

Eva related her dream, which caused much excitement "And the five knocks came Four soft and one hard," she went on "I sprang out of bed, and ran into the passage Mrs Merry met me with the news that my father had been brought home dead Then I attended to the body, while Mrs Merry told Jackson, who went to see Mr Wasp"

"What did you do with the wire?" asked the coroner looking perplexed at this strange contradictory evidence, as he well might

"I gave it to Inspector Garrit"

"Here it is," said the inspector producing it, "when I was in town, I went to the office whence this had been sent It was the St James's Street office where the other wire had been sent from I learnt from a smart operator that the telegram had been brought in by a ragged, red haired boy —"

"Butsey," cried Mrs Merry, folding her shawl tightly round her lean form

"Yes," said Garrit, nodding, "apparently it is the same boy who joined the three men when they carried the body home and knocked five times"

"And the same boy as told me a lie about Cain," cried Mrs Merry, "what do you make of it all, gentlemen?"

Mrs Merry was rebuked, but the jury and coroner looked puzzled They could make nothing of it Inquiry showed that Butsey had vanished from the neighbourhood Wasp deposed to having seen the lad "Ragged and white-faced and red-haired he was," said Wasp, "with a wicked eye——"

"Wicked eyes," corrected the coroner

"Eye," snapped Wasp respectfully, "he'd only one eye, but 'twas bright and wicked enough to be two I asked him—on the Westhaven road—what he was doing there, as we didn't like vagrants He said he'd come from London to Westhaven with a Sunday school treat I gave him a talking to, and he ran away in the direction of Westhaven. Oh, sir," added Wasp, obviously annoyed, "if I'd only known about the knocking, and the lying to Mrs Merry, and the telegram, I'd have taken him in charge"

"Well, you couldn't help it, knowing no reason why the lad should be detained," said the coroner, "but search for him, Wasp"

"At Westhaven? I will sir And I'll see about the Sunday school too He'd be known to the teachers"

Mrs Merry snorted "That's another lie I don't believe the brat has anything to do with Sunday schools, begging your pardon, Mr Shakerley He's a liar, and I don't believe his name's Butsey at all"

"Well, well," said the coroner impatiently, "let us get on with the inquest What further evidence have you inspector?"

"I have to speak," said Mr Mask rising and looking more yellow and prim than ever as he took the oath "I am Mr Strode's legal adviser He came to see me two or three times while he was in town He stated that he was going down to Wargrove"

"On what day did he say?"

"On no particular day He said he would be going down some time, but he was in no hurry"

"Didn't he tell you he was going down on Thursday?"

"No He never named the day"

"Had he any idea of meeting with a violent death?"

"If he had, he certainly would not have come," said Mask grimly, "my late client had a very good idea of looking after his own skin. But he certainly hinted that he was in danger"

"Explain yourself"

"He said that if he couldn't come

himself to see me again he would send his wooden hand"

The coroner looked puzzled "What do you mean?"

"Mr Strode," said Mask primly, "talked to me about some money he wished to place in my keeping I was to give it back to him personally, or when he sent the wooden hand I understood from what he hinted that there was a chance he might get into trouble But he explained nothing He always spoke little and to the point

"And have you got the money?"

"No Mr Strode didn't leave it with me"

"Then why did he remark about his wooden hand?"

"I expect he intended to leave the money with me when he returned from Wargrove So it would seem that he did not expect anything to happen to him on his visit to his native place If he had expected a tragedy, he would have the money and the wooden hand would have been the token for me to give it"

"To whom, sir?"

"To the person who brought the wooden hand"

"And has it been brought?"

"No But I understand from Inspector Garrit that the hand has been stolen"

"Dear me dear me" Mr Shakerley rubbed his bald head irritably "This case is most perplexing Who stole the hand?"

Mr Hill came forward at this point and related how he had gone into the death chamber to find the hand gone Eva detailed how she had seen the hand still attached to the arm at lawn, and Mrs Merry deposed that she saw the hand with the body at nine o'clock These witnesses were exhaustively examined, but nothing further could be learned Mr Strode had been shot through the heart, and the wooden hand had been stolen. But who had shot him, or who had stolen the hand, could not be discovered

The coroner did his best to bring out further evidence but neither Wasp nor Garrit could supply any more witnesses The further the case was gone into, the more mysterious did it seem The money of the deceased was untouched, so robbery could not have been the motive for the commission of the crime Finally, after a vain endeavour to penetrate the mystery, the jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown"

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW LIFE

Nothing new was discovered after the inquest, although all inquiries were made Butsey had vanished He was traced to Westhaven after his interview with Wasp, and from that place had taken the train to London But after landing at Liverpool Street Station, he disappeared into the world of humanity, and not even the efforts of the London police could bring him to light No weapon had been found near the Red Deep spring, nor could any footmarks be discerned likely to lead to a detection of the assassin Mr Strode had been shot by some unknown person, and it seemed as though the affair would have to be relegated to the list of mysterious crimes Perhaps the absence of a reward had something to do with the inactivity displayed by Garrit and Wasp

But how could a reward be offered when Eva had no money? After the funeral, and when the dead man had been bestowed in the Strode vault under St Peter's Church, the lawyer called to see the girl He told her coldly, and without displaying any sympathy, that her father had left no money in his hands, and that he could do nothing for her Eva, having been brought up in idleness, was alarmed at the prospect before her She did not know what to do

"I must earn my bread in some

way,' she said to Mrs Merry a week later, when consulting about ways and means "I can't be a burden on your Nanny '

"Deary," said the old woman, taking the girl's hand within her withered claws, "you ain't no burden, whatever you may say You stay along with your old nurse, who loves you, an' who has fifty pound a year, to say nothing of the castle and the land"

"But, Nanny, I can't stay on here for ever"

"And you won't with that beauty,' said Mrs Merry sturdily, "bless you, deary, Mr Allen will marry you straight off if you'll only say the word I saw him in the village this very day, his foot being nearly well To be sure he was with his jelly-fish of a pa, but I took it kind of him that he stopped and spoke to me He wants to marry you out of hand, Miss Eva

'I know,' said the girl, flushing 'I never doubted Allen's love He has asked me several times since the funeral to become his wife But my poor father

"Poor father!" echoed Mrs Merry in tones of contempt, "well, as he was your pa after all, there ain't nothing to be said, whatever you may think, Miss Eva But he was a bad lot"

"Mrs Merry, he's dead,' said Eva rebukingly

The old woman rubbed her hands and tucked them under her apron "I know that," said she with bright eyes, "and put 'longside that suffering saint your dear ma but their souls won't be together whatever you may say, deary Well, I'll say no more Bad he was, and a bad end he come to I don't weep for him,' added Mrs Merry viciously, "no more nor I'd weep for Giles if he was laid out, and a nasty corp he'd make"

Eva shuddered "Don't speak like that"

"Well then deary, I won't, me not being wishful to make your young blood run cold But as to what you'll do, I'll just tell you what I've thought of, lying awake There's the empty room across the passage waiting for a lodger, then the cow's milk can be sold, and there's garden stuff by the bushel for sale. I might let out the meadow as a grazing ground, too," said Mrs Merry, rubbing her nose thoughtfully "but that the cow's as greedy a cow as I ever set eyes on, an' I've had to do with 'em all my born days, Miss Eva All this, rent free, my dear, and fifty pounds in cash You'll be as happy as a queen living here, singing like a bee And then when the year's mourning is over—not as he deserves it you'll marry Mr Allen and all will be gay"

"Dear Nanny,' said the girl, throwing her arms round the old woman's neck, "how good you are But, indeed I can't '

'Then you must marry Mr Allen straight away

'I can't do that either I must earn my bread'

What" screeched Mrs Merry, "and you a born lady! Never, that saint would turn in her grave - and I wonder she don't, seeing she's laid 'longside him as tortured her when alive There's your titles, of course, Lord Ipson and his son"

"I wouldn't take a penny from them,' said Eva colouring "They never took any notice of me when my father was alive, and '

"He didn't get on well with 'em,' cried Mrs Merry, "and who did he get on with, I ask you, deary? There's Lady Ipson - she would have made much of you, but for him'

"I don't like Lady Ipson, Nanny She called here, if you remember, when my mother was alive I'm not going to be patronised by her '

"Ah, Miss Eva,' said the old dame admiringly, "it's a fine, bright, hardy spirit of your own as you've got Lady Ipson is as old as I am, and makes herself up young with paint

and them things But she has a heart When she learned of your poverty——"

Eva sprang to her feet "No! no! no!" she cried vehemently, "never mention her to me again I would not go to my mother's family for bread if I was starving What I eat, I'll earn"

"Tell Mr Allen so," said Mrs Merry, peering out of the window, "here he comes His foot 'ull get worse, if he walk so fast," she added, with her usual pessimism

Allen did not wait to enter in by the door, but paused at the open window before which Eva was standing He looked ill and white and worried, but his foot was better, though even now, he had to use a stick, and walked slowly "You should not have come out to day," said Eva, shaking her finger at him

"As Mrs Mountain would not go to Mr Mahomet," said Allen, trying to smile, "Mr Mahomet had to come to Mrs Mountain Wait till I come in, Eva," and he disappeared

The girl busied herself in arranging an arm-chair with cushions, and made her lover sit down when he was in the room "There! you're more comfortable" She sat down beside him "I'll get you a cup of tea"

"Don't bother," murmured Allen, closing his eyes

"It's no bother In any case tea will have to be brought in Mrs Palmer is coming to see me soon She wants to talk to me"

"What about?"

"I can't say but she asked me particularly to be at home to-day We can have our talk first, though Do smoke, Allen"

"No I don't feel inclined to smoke"

"Will you have some fruit?"

"No, thank you," he said, so listlessly that Eva looked at him in alarm She noted how thin his face was, and how he had lost his colour.

"You do look ill, Allen."

He smiled faintly "The foot has pulled me down"

"Are you sure it's only the foot?" she inquired, puzzled.

"What else should it be?" asked Allen quietly; "you see I'm so used to being in the open air, that a few days within doors, soon takes my colour away But my foot is nearly well I'll soon be myself again. But, Eva," he took her hand, "do you know why I come?"

"Yes," she said looking away, "to ask me again to be your wife"

"You have guessed it the first time," replied Allen, trying to be jocular, "this is the third time of asking Come, Eva," he added coaxingly, "have you considered what I said?"

"You want me to marry you at once," she murmured

"Next week, if possible Then I can take you with me to South America, and we can start a new life, far away from those old vexations Come, Eva Near the mine, where I and Parkins are working, there's a sleepy old Spanish town where I can buy the most delightful house The climate is glorious, and we would be so happy You'll soon pick up the language"

"But why do you want me to leave England, Allen?"

Hill turned away his head as he answered. "I haven't enough money to keep you here in a proper position," he said quietly. "My father allows me nothing, and will allow me nothing I have to earn my own bread, Eva, and to do so, have to live for the time being in South America I used to think it exile, but with you by my side, dearest, it will be paradise I want to marry you my mother is eager to welcome you as her daughter, and——"

"And your father," said Eva, seeing he halted.

Allen made a gesture of indifference "My father doesn't care one way or the other, darling. You should know my father by this time He is wrapped

up in himself Egotism is a disease with him"

Eva twisted her hands together and frowned "Allen, I really can't marry you,' she said decisively, "think how my father was murdered!"

"What has that to do with it?" demanded Allen almost forcely

"Dear, how you frighten me There's no need to scowl in that way You have a temper, Allen, I can see"

"It shall never be shown to you," he said fondly "Come, Eva"

But she still shook her head "Allen, I had small cause to love my father, as you know Still, he has been foully murdered I have made up my mind to find out who killed him before I marry"

Allen rose in spite of his weak ankle and flung away her hand "Oh, Eva,' he said roughly, "is that all you care for me? My happiness is to be settled in this vague way——"

'Vague way——?"

'Certainly!" cried Hill excitedly, 'you may never learn who killed your father There's not a scrap of evidence to show who shot him"

I may find Butsey," said Eva looking obstinate

'You'll never find him, and even if you do, how do we know that he can tell?'

"I am certain that he can tell much, said Miss Strode determinedly 'Think, Allen He sent the telegram probably by order of my father's enemy He came suddenly on those men at midnight when they were carrying the body What was a child like that doing out so late, if he wasn't put up to mischief by some other person? And he knocked as happened in my dream, remember," she said, sinking her voice, "and then he came here with a lying message on the very day my father's wooden hand was stolen'

"Do you think he stole it?"

"Yes, I do, though why he should behave so I can't say But I am quite sure that Butsey is acting on behalf of some other person—probably the man who killed my father"

Allen shrugged his shoulders frowningly "Perhaps Butsey killed Mr Strode himself," he said, "he has all the precocity of a criminal"

"We might even learn that," replied Eva, annoyed by Allen's tone, "but I am quite bent on searching for this boy and of learning who killed my father and why he was killed."

"How will you set about it?" asked Allen sullenly

"I don't know I have no money and no influence, and I am only a girl But I'll learn the truth somehow"

Hill walked up and down the little room with a slight limp, though his foot was much better and gave him no pain. He was annoyed that Eva should be so bent on avenging the murder of her father, for he quite agreed with Miss Merry that the man was not worth it But he knew that Eva had a mulish vein in her nature, and from the look on her face and from the hard tones of her voice, he was sure she would not be easily turned from her design For a few minutes he thought in silence, Eva watching him intently Then he turned suddenly "Eva, my dear," he said, holding out his hands, "since you are so bent upon learning the truth leave it in my hands I'll be better able to see about the matter than you And if I find out who killed your father——"

'I'll marry you at once!" she cried, and threw herself into his arms

"I hope so,' said Allen in a choked voice 'I'll do my best, Eva, no man can do more But if I fail, you must marry me Here, I'll make a bargain with you If I can't find the assassin within a year, will you give over this idea and become my wife?"

"Yes," said Eva frankly, "but I am certain that the man will be found through that boy Butsey"

"He has to be found first," said Allen with a sigh, "and that is no easy task Well, Eva, I'll settle my affairs and start on this search"

"Your affairs!" said Eva in a tone of surprise

"Ah," said the young man smiling, "you have seen me idle for so long that you think I have nothing to do But I have to get back soon to Bolivia My friend Parkins and I are working an old silver mine for a Spanish Don But we discovered another and richer mine shown to me by an Indian I believe it was worked hundreds of years ago by the Inca kings Parkins and I can buy it, but we have not the money I came home to see if my father would help me But I might have spared myself the trouble he refused at once Since then I have been trying all these months to find a capitalist, but as yet I have not been successful But I'll get him soon, and then Parkins and I will buy the mine, and make our fortunes I wish you'd give up this wild goose chase after your father's murderer and let us go to Bolivia

"No," said Eva, "I must learn the truth I would never be happy if I died without knowing who killed my father, and why he was killed

"Well, then I'll do my best I have written to Parkins asking him to give me another six months to find a capitalist and I shall have to take rooms in London While there I'll look at the same time for Butsey and perhaps may learn the truth But if I don't— "

"I'll marry you, if you don't find the assassin in a year" said Eva embracing him "Ah, Allen, don't look so angry I don't want you to search all your life but one year—twelve months -

"Then it's a bargain," said Allen kissing her, "and, by the way I shall have the assistance of Parkins's brother"

"Who is he?" asked Eva, "I don't want every one to- — "

"Oh, that's all right Parkins tells me his brother is shrewd and clever I may as well have his assistance Besides, I got a letter from Horace Parkins—that's the brother, for my man is called Mark—and he is in town now He has just come from South Africa, so he may know of your father's doings there"

"Oh," Eva looked excited, "and he may be able to say who killed him!"

Allen shrugged his shoulders "I don't say that Your father may have had enemies in England as well as in Africa But we'll see I have never met Horace Parkins, but if he's as good a fellow as his brother Mark, my chum and partner, he'll do all he can to help me"

"I am sure you will succeed, Allen," cried Eva joyfully, "look how things are fitting in Mr Parkins, coming from Africa, is just the person to know about my father"

Young Hill said nothing He fancied that Horace Parkins might know more about Mr Strode than Eva would like to hear, for if the man was so great a scamp in England, he certainly would not settle down to a respectable life in the wilds However he said nothing on this point, but merely reiterated his promise to find out who murdered Robert Strode and then drew Eva down beside him "What about yourself?" he asked anxiously

"I don't know Mrs Merry wants me to stop here"

"I should think that is the best thing to do

"But I can't," replied Eva, shaking her head, "Mrs Merry is poor I can't live on her"

"I admire your spirit, Eva, but I don't think Mrs Merry would think you were doing her anything but honour"

"All the more reason I should not take advantage of her kindness"

Allen laughed "You argue well," he said indulgently "But see here, dearest My mother is fond of you, and knows your position. She wants you to come to her"

"Oh, Allen, if she were alone I would love to" I am very devoted to your mother But your father — "

"He won't mind"

"But I do," said Eva, her colour rising "I don't like to say so to you, Allen, but I must"

"Say what?"

"That I don't like your father very much"

"That means you don't like him at all," said the son coolly "Dear me, Eva, what unpleasant parents you and I have Your father and mine neither very popular But you won't come?"

"I can't Allen"

"You know my father is your dead father's dearest friend

"All the same I can't come

"What will you do, then?" asked Allen vexed

"Go out as a governess"

"No, you must not do that Why not

Before Allen could propose anything the door opened and Mrs Merry, with a sour face, ushered in Mrs Palmer The widow looked prettier and brighter than ever, though rather commonplace With a disdainful sniff Mrs Merry banged the door

"Eva, dear," said Mrs Palmer "Mr Hill, how are you? I've come on business"

"Business?" said Eva surprised

"Yes Pardon me being so abrupt, but if I don't ask you now I'll lose courage I want you to come and be my companion"

CHAPTER IX

THE MYSTERIOUS PARCEL

So here was a way opened by Providence in an unexpected direction Mrs. Palmer, with a high colour and rather a nervous look, stood waiting for Eva's reply The girl looked at her lover, but Allen, very wisely, said nothing He thought that this was a matter which Eva should settle for herself But he was secretly amused at the abrupt way in which the little widow had spoken It seemed as though she was asking a favour instead of conferring one. Miss Strode was the first of the three to recover, and then she did not reply immediately She first wanted to know why Mrs Palmer had made so generous an offer

"Do sit down," she said, pushing forward a chair, "and then we can talk the matter over I need not tell you that I am very thankful for your kind offer"

"Oh, my dear," Mrs Palmer sank into the chair, and fanned herself with a lace handkerchief, "if you accept it it is I who shall be thankful I do hate living by myself, and I've never been able to find a companion I liked But you, dear Eva, have always been a pet of mine I have known you for four years, and I always did think you the very dearest of girls If you will only come we shall be so happy"

"But what makes you think that I want to be any one's companion?"

Mrs Palmer coloured and laughed nervously She was very pretty, but with her pink and white complexion and flaxen hair and pale blue eyes she looked like a wax doll Any one could see at a glance that she was perfectly honest So shallow a nature was incapable of plotting, or of acting in a double fashion Yet Eva wondered all the same that the widow should have made her so abrupt a proposal So far as she knew, no one was aware that she was in want of money, and it seemed strange if providential that Mrs Palmer should come in the very nick of time to help her in this way

"Well, my dear," she said at length and looking at her primrose-hued gloves, "it was Lord Sutton who led me to make the offer"

"My cousin" Eva frowned and Allen looked up "Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes Didn't I mention that I did?"

"No I was not aware that you had ever met"

"We did in town about a year ago I met him only once when I was at Mr Mask's to dinner Since then I have not seen him until the other day, and perhaps that was why I said nothing I remember you told me he was your cousin, Eva, but I quite forgot to say that I knew him"

"Do you know Mr Mask?" asked Hill

"Of course I do You know I quarrelled with my old lawyer about the money left by Palmer He was most disagreeable, so I resolved to change for a nicer man I spoke to your father about it, and he kindly gave me the address of his own lawyer I went up and settled things most satisfactorily Of course Mr Mask is a fearful old mummy," prattled on Mrs Palmer in her airy fashion, "but he is agreeable over legal matters and understands business Palmer's affairs were rather complicated, you know, so I placed them all in Mr Mask's hands He has been my lawyer ever since, and I have every reason to be pleased"

"And you met my cousin there?" said Eva doubtfully

"Lord Saltars? Yes I was dining with Mr Mask and his wife in their Bloomsbury Square house, a doleful old place Lord Saltars came in to see Mr Mask on business after dinner, so Mr Mask asked him in to drink coffee I was there, and so we met"

"Did he mention my name?" asked Miss Strode stiffly

"Oh dear, no He was unaware that I lived in the same village as you did We talked about general things But he mentioned it to me the other night at the circus, when I went to see the performance at Shanton"

"Did you go there?"

"Yes, my dear, I did," said Mrs Palmer, laughing "I'm sure this place is dull enough Any amusement pleases me. I didn't know at the time that your father was dead, Eva, or I should not have gone--not that I knew Mr Strode, but still, you are my friend, and I should have come to comfort you But you know I'm at the other end of the village, and the news had not time to get to me before I started for Shanton to luncheon with some friends I remained with them for the night, and we went to the circus Lord Saltars sat next to me, and we remembered that we had met before In the course of conversation I mentioned that I lived at Wargrove, and he asked if I knew you I said that I did"

"How did Lord Saltars know of the murder?" asked Allen hastily

"I believe he learned it from one of the performers called Miss- -"

"Miss Lorry," said Eva, colouring--"I remember Gun told her, and she had the audacity to speak to me"

Allen said nothing, remembering the message Miss Lorry had delivered relative to the wooden hand He had not spoken of it to Eva hitherto, and thought wisely that this was not the time to reveal his knowledge He preferred to listen to Mrs Palmer, who as yet had not shown how she came to know that Eva needed the offer of a situation

"So Miss Lorry spoke to you?" said Mrs Palmer with great curiosity, "such a bold woman, though handsome enough Lord Saltars seems to think a lot of her Indeed I heard a rumour that he was about to marry her My friends told me But people will gossip," added Mrs Palmer apologetically

"Lord Saltars and his doings do not interest me," said Eva coldly "We have only met once, and I don't like him He is too fast for me I could never enjoy the company of a man like that I think as he was related by marriage to my father, he might have called to see me about the matter, and offered his assistance"

"We can do without that," cried Allen quickly

"Lord Saltars doesn't know that we can," replied Eva sharply, "however, I understand how you met him, Mrs. Palmer, and how he came to

know about the murder through Miss Lorry, who heard of it from Cain. But what has all this to do with your asking me to be your companion?"

Mrs Palmer coloured again and seemed embarrassed "My dear," she said seriously, "I shall have to tell you about Mr Mask first, that you may know all After the inquest he called to see me——"

"But he came here," put in Eva

"Quite so, and told you that your father had left no money"

"How do you know that?"

"Mr Mask told me," said the widow simply, and laid her hand on Eva's hand, "don't be angry, my dear Mr Mask came to me and told me you were poor He asked me if I would help you in what way I could, as he said he knew I was rich and kind hearted I am the first, but I really don't know if I am the last"

"I think you are," said Miss Strode softly "I never gave Mr Mask leave to talk of my business, and I don't know why he should have done so, as he did not seem to care what became of me"

"Oh, but I think he intended to help you if he could, and came to tell me of your dilemma for that purpose, Eva"

"Apparently he wished to play the part of a good Samaritan at your expense, Mrs Palmer, said Eva dryly, "however, I understand how you came to know that I needed assistance, but Lord Saltars——"

"Ah!" cried the widow vivaciously, "that is what puzzles me Lord Saltars seems to think you are rich"

"Rich?" echoed Allen, while Eva also looked surprised

"Yes He said you would no doubt inherit your father's money I answered—pardon me, Eva—that Mr Strode was not rich, for I heard so in another quarter"

Eva looked at Allen, and Allen at Eva. Both guessed that the quarter indicated was Mr Hill, who had a long tongue and small discretion

Mrs Palmer, however, never noticed the exchange of glances, and prattled on "Lord Saltars insisted that your father had brought home a fortune from Africa"

"How did he know that?" asked Allen quickly

"I don't know, he didn't say I of course began to believe him, for when I hinted doubts, Lord Saltars said that if I offered to help you, I would learn that you were poor I really thought you were rich, Eva, till Mr Mask came to me, or I should have come before to make you this offer But Mr Mask undeceived me I told him what Lord Saltars had said, but Mr Mask replied that his lordship was quite wrong—that Mr Strode had left no money, and that you would not be able to live I therefore came to ask you to be my companion at the salary of one hundred a year I don't know how I dare offer it, my dear," said the good-hearted widow, "and if I hadn't spoken just when I came in, I should not have had the courage But now I have made the offer, what do you say?"

"I think it is very good and kind of you——"

"And bold Yes, I can see it in your eyes—very speaking eyes they are that you think I am bold in meddling with your private affairs But if you really think so, please forgive me and I'll go away You may be sure I'll hold my tongue about the matter If every one thinks you are rich—as they do—it is not for me to contradict them"

Eva laughed rather sadly "I really don't know why people think I am rich," she said in a low voice, "my father has always been poor through speculation What his money affairs were when he came home I don't know He said nothing to me, and no papers were found at the hotel or in his pockets, likely to throw light on them He never told Mr. Mask he was rich——"

"I thought at the inquest Mr. Mask said something about money

being left in his charge, Eva?" said Allen.

Miss Strode nodded. "My father mentioned that later he might give Mr. Mask some money to hold for him, and that he would come again himself to get it. If not, he would send his wooden hand as a sign that the money should be handed over to any one who brought it."

"Humph," said Allen pulling his moustache, "it seems to me that the hand has been stolen for that purpose.

"If so it will be taken to Mr. Mask, and then we will learn who stole it. But of course Mr. Mask will not be able to give any money, as my father, so he said, never left any with him.

"This is all most interesting and mysterious," said Mrs. Palmer. "Oh dear me! I wonder who killed your poor father? Don't look anxious, Eva, what you and Mr. Hill say, will never be repeated by me. All I come for is to make this offer, and if you think me rude or interfering I can only apologise and withdraw."

Eva caught the widow by the hand. "I think you are very kind," she said cordially, "and I thankfully accept your offer."

"Oh, you dear girl!" and Mrs. Palmer embraced her.

"Have you quite decided to do that, Eva?" asked Allen.

"Quite," she answered firmly. "Mrs. Palmer likes me——"

"I quite adore you, Eva, dear!" cried the widow.

"And I am fond of her."

"I know you are dear, though you never would call me Constance."

"Later I may call you Constance," said Eva smiling at the simple way in which Mrs. Palmer talked. "So you may look upon it as settled. I shall come to be your companion whenever you like."

"Come at once, dear."

"No, I must wait here a few days to reconcile my old nurse to my departure."

"Mrs. Merry? Oh, Eva, I am afraid she will hate me for this. She doesn't like me as it is. I don't know why," added Mrs. Palmer dolefully. "I am always polite to the lower orders."

"Mrs. Merry is an odd woman," said Eva rising, "but her heart is in the right place."

"Odd people's hearts always are," said the widow.

"Wait here and talk to Allen," said Eva going to the door. "I'll see about tea."

But the fact is Eva wanted to talk to Mrs. Merry, anxious to get over a disagreeable interview, as she knew there would be strenuous opposition. To her surprise, however, Mrs. Merry was in favour of the scheme, and announced her decision when Eva came to the kitchen.

"Don't tell me about it, Miss Eva," she said, "for I had my ear to the keyhole all the time."

"Oh, Nanny!"

"And why do you say that?" asked the old woman bristling, "it I can't get the right to look after you who has? I never cared for that Mrs. Palmer, as is common of course, so I listened to hear what she'd come about."

"Then you know all. What do you say?"

"Go, of course."

"But, Nanny, I thought——"

"I know you did, dearey," said Mrs. Merry penitently. "I'm always calling folk names by reason of my having bin put on in life. And Mrs. Palmer is common—there's no denying—her father being a chemist and her late husband eggs and butter. But she's got a kind heart, though I don't see what right that Mask thing had to talk to her of your being poor when I've got this roof and fifty pound. Nasty creature, he wouldn't help you. But Mrs. Palmer is kind, Miss Eva, so I say, take what she offers. You'll be near me, and perhaps you'll be able to teach her manners, though you'll never make a silk purse out of a swine's ear."

Eva was surprised by this surrender, and moreover saw that Mrs Merry's eyes were red In her hands she held a letter, and Eva remembered that the post had called an hour before "Have you had bad news, Nanny?" she asked anxiously

"I got a letter from Giles," said Mrs Merry dully, "he writes from Whitechapel, saying he's down on his luck and may come home That's why I want you to go to Mrs Palmer, deary I can't keep you here with a nasty, swearing jail bird in the house Oh dear me," cried Mrs Merry bursting into tears, "and I thought Giles was dead, whatever you may say, drat him!"

"But, Nanny, you needn't have him in the house if he treats you badly This place is your own"

"I must have him," said the old woman helplessly, "else he'll bread the winders and disgrace me before every one You don't know what an awful man he is when roused He'd murder me if I crossed him But to think he should turn up after all these years when I thought him as dead and buried and being punished for his wickedness

"Nanny," said Eva kissing the poor wrinkled face, "I'll speak to you later about this Meanwhile I'll tell Mrs Palmer that I accept her offer

"You do, deary It goes to my heart for you to leave But 'tis better so, and you'll have your pride satisfied And it will be Christian work," added Mrs Merry, "to dress that widder properly Rainbows ain't in it, with the colours she puts on"

Eva could not help smiling at this view of the matter, and withdrew to excuse herself offering tea to Mrs Palmer Nanny was not in a state to make tea, and Eva wished to return and learn more, also to comfort her She therefore again told Mrs Palmer that she accepted the offer and would come to her next week Then taking leave of Allen, Eva went back to the kitchen Mrs Palmer and her companion walked down the road

"I hope you think I've acted rightly, Mr Hill," said the widow

"I think you are most kind," said Allen, "and I hope you will make Eva happy"

"I'll do my best She shall be a sister to me But I think," said Mrs Palmer archly, "that some one else may make her happier"

"That is not to be my fate at present," said Allen a little sadly Good-bye, Mrs Palmer I'll come and see you and Eva before I go to town"

"You'll always be welcome, Mr Hill, and I can play the part of gooseberry" So they parted laughing

Allen, thinking of this turn in Eva's affairs which had given her a home and a kind woman to look after her, walked towards the common to get a breath of fresh air before returning to "The Arabian Nights" Also he wished to think over his plans regarding meeting Horace Parkins and searching for Bulsey, on whom seemed to hang the whole matter of the discovery of Strode's assassin At the end of the road the young man was stopped by a tall, fresh-coloured girl neatly dressed, who dropped a curtsey

"Well, Jane, and how are you?" asked Allen kindly, recognising the girl as Weep's eldest daughter

"I'm quite well, and, please, I was to give you this," said Jane

Allen took a brown paper parcel and looked at it with surprise It was directed to "Lawrence Hill" "My father" said Allen "Why don't you take it to the house?"

"I saw you coming, so, and I thought I'd give it to you I've just walked from Westhaven, and father will be expecting me home I won't have time to take the parcel to 'The Arabian Nights'"

"Where did this come from?" asked Allen, tucking the parcel under his arm.

"I got it from Cain, sir, at Colchester"

"Have you been there?" asked Hill, noting the girl's blush He

knew that Cain and Jane Wasp admired one another, though the policeman was not at all in favour of Cain, whom he regarded, and with some right to do so, as a vagabond.

"Yes, sir Mother sent me over with a message to a friend of hers I walked to Westhaven and took the train to Colchester Stag's Circus is there, and I met Cain He brought that parcel and asked me to take it to Mr Hill"

"But why should Cain send parcels to my father?" said Allen

"I don't know, sir But I must get home, or father will be angry'

When the girl marched off- which she did in a military way suggestive of her father's training -Allen proceeded homeward The parcel was very light and he could not conjecture what was inside it He noted that the address had been written by some one to whom writing was a pain, for the calligraphy sprawled and wavered lamentably Cain had been to a board school and could write very well, so apparently it was not his writing Allen wondered who could be corresponding with his father, but as the matter was really none of his business, he took the parcel home At the gate of "The Arabian Nights" he met his father

Mr Hill was as gay and as airy as ever, and wore his usual brown velvet coat and white trousers Also he had on the large straw hat, and a rose bloomed in his buttonhole He saluted his son in an off-hand manner "I've been walking, Allen," he said lightly, "to get inspiration for a poem on the fall of Jerusalem'

"I think some Italian poet has written on that subject, sir."

"But not as it should be written, Allen However, I can't waste time now in enlightening your ignorance What have you here?"

"A parcel for you,' and Allen gave it

"For me, really" Mr Hill was like a child with a new toy, and sat down on the grass by the gate to open it The removal of the brown paper revealed a cardboard box Hill lifted the lid, and there were two dry sticks tied in the form of a cross with a piece of grass But Allen looked at this only for a moment His father had turned white, and after a moment quietly fainted away The young man looked down with a haggard face "Am I right after all?" he asked himself

CHAPTER X

MRS HILL EXPLAINS

An hour later Allen was conversing with his mother Mr Hill, carried into the house by Allen, had been revived but he steadfastly refused to speak as to the cause of his faintness, and put it down to the heat of the weather and to his having taken too long a walk These excuses were so feeble that the son could not help his lip curling at them in manifest untruth Hill saw this and told Allen he would lie down for an hour or so 'When I rise I may tell you something,' he said feebly

'I think we may as well understand one another,' said Allen, coldly

'Bring in here those things which came in the parcel,' said Hill

"Only one thing came,' replied his son—"a rough cross— -'

"Yes yes I know Bring it in - paper and box and all Where did you get it?"

Allen explained how Jane Wasp received it from Cain at Colchester, and Mr Hill listened attentively "I understand now,' he said at length "Put the things in my study. I'll see you later— say in two hours"

The young man, wondering what it all meant, departed and left his father to take—on the face of it—a much-needed sleep He went outside and picked up the cross, the box, and the paper, which still remained on the grassy bank near the gate These he brought into the study, and examined them But nothing was revealed to his intelligence The box was an

ordinary cardboard one, he did not recognise the ill-formed writing, and the cross was simply two sticks tied together by a wisp of dry grass. Why the contents of the box should have terrified his father Allen could not say And that the sight of the symbol did terrify him, he was well assured, since Mr Hill was not a man given to fainting. The box came from some one who knew Mr Hill well, as the name Lawrence was on it, and this was his father's second name rarely used Mr Hill usually called himself Harold, and suppressed the Lawrence But Allen had seen the middle name inscribed in an old book, which had been given by Strode to Hill in their college days This coincidence made Allen wonder if the sending of the cross and the use of the rarely-used name had anything to do with the murder

While he thus thought, with his face growing darker and darker, the door opened and Mrs Hill entered She had been working in her own room, and knew nothing of the affair But some instinct made her aware that Allen was in the house, and she never failed to be with him when he was at home Indeed, she was hardly able to bear him out of her sight, and seized every opportunity to be in his presence With this love it was strange that Mrs Hill should be content that Allen should remain in South America for so long, and pay only flying visits to the paternal roof

"You are back, Allen," she said softly, and came forward to lay her hand on his wrinkled forehead "My dear boy why that frown ' Has Eva been unkind '"

"Oh no," said Allen, taking his mother's hand and kissing it, "she will not marry me yet"

"Foolish girl What does she intend to do—stop with Mrs Merry, I suppose, which is a dull life for her ? Far better if she came to me, even if she will not marry you at once '

"She has accepted the position of companion to Mrs Palmer '

"Indeed," said Mrs Hill, looking surprised; "I should have thought her pride would have prevented her placing herself under an obligation."

Allen shrugged his shoulders "There is no obligation," he said, "Eva is to be paid a salary Besides, she likes Mrs Palmer, and so do I "

"She is not a lady," said Mrs Hill, pursing up her lips

"Nevertheless she has a kind heart, and will make Eva very happy I think, mother, it is the best that can be done Eva doesn't want to come here, and she will not marry me until the murderer of her father is discovered "

"Why won't she come to me ?" asked Mrs Hill sharply

Allen looked down 'She doesn't like my father,' he said

"Very rude of her to tell you that But I know my poor Harold is not popular "

"He is whimsical," said Allen, "and somehow, Eva can't get on with him She was not rude, mother, but simply stated a fact She likes my father well enough to meet him occasionally, but she would not care to live with him And if it comes to that," added Allen frowning, "no more should I He is too eccentric for me, mother, and I should think for you, mother "

"I am fond of your father in my own way," said Mrs Hill, looking down and speaking in a low voice, as though she made an effort to confess as much But does Eva expect to find out who murdered Mr Strode ?"

"Yes She refuses to marry me until the assassin is found and punished As she was bent on searching for the man herself, I offered to search for her "

Mrs Hill frowned "Why did you do that ?" she asked sharply, "Strode is nothing to you, and you have to return to America Far better find that capitalist you want, than waste your time in avenging the death of that man '

"You don't seem to like Mr Strode, mother "

"I hate him," said the woman harshly and clenching her fist "I have cause to hate him"

"Had my father cause also?" asked Allen pointedly

She looked away "I don't know," she answered gloomily "Strode and your father were very intimate all their lives, till both married Then we saw very little of him He was not a good man Strode, I mean Allen If my word has any weight with you, stop this search"

The young man rose and began to pace the library "Mother, I must take up the search, he said in an agitated voice, "for my father's sake No one but myself must seem to for the assassin"

"What do you mean by that?" questioned Mrs Hill, sitting very upright and frowning darker than ever

Allen replied by asking a question "Who knows that my father is called Lawrence, mother?"

Mrs Hill uttered an ejaculation of surprise and grew pale "Who told you he was called so?"

"I found the name in an old book of Cowper's poems given by Mr Strode to my father in their college days It was presented to Harold Lawrence Hill

"I remember the book," said Mrs Hill, recovering her composure "But what is odd about your father having two names? He certainly has dropped the Lawrence and calls himself simply, Harold Hill but that is for the sake of convenience Only those who knew him in his young days would know the name of Lawrence

"Ah!" said Allen thoughtfully turning over the brown paper, "then this was sent by some one who knew him in his young days"

Mrs Hill looked at the brown paper covering, at the box, and at the roughly-formed cross "What are these?" she asked carelessly

"That is what I should like to know," said her son, "at least I should like to know why the sight of this cross made my father faint"

Mrs Hill gasped, and laid her hand on her heart as though she felt a sudden pain "Did he faint?" she asked - "did Lawrence faint?" The young man noticed the slip Usually his mother called his father Mr Hill or Harold, but never till this moment had he heard her call him Lawrence Apparently the memory of old events was working in her breast But she seemed genuinely perplexed as to the reason of Hill's behaviour at the sight of the cross "Where did he faint?"

"Outside the gate," said Allen quickly, and explained how he had received the parcel from Jim Wasp, and the circumstance of its delivery, ending with the query "Why did he faint?"

"I can't say," said Mrs Hill, pushing back the cross and box petulantly, "there is no reason so far as I know We'll ask your father when he awakens"

"He said he would explain," said Allen sadly "and between you and me, mother, we must have an explanation"

"Your father won't like the use of the word must, Allen"

"I can't help that," said the young man doggedly, and went to the door of the library He opened it, looked out, and then closed it again His mother saw all this with surprise, and was still more surprised when Allen spoke again "Do you know, mother, why I say I must undertake this investigation?"

"No," said Mrs Hill, calmly, "I don't know"

"It is because I wish to save my father's good name"

"Is it in danger?" asked the woman, turning pale again

"It might be--if any one knew he met Mr Strode at the Red Deeps on the night of the murder"

Mrs Hill leaped to her feet and clutched her son's arm "Allen," she gasped, and the ashen colour of

her face alarmed him, "how dare you say that—it is not possible it cannot—cannot—'

"It is possible,' said Allen firmly "Sit down mother, and let me explain I held my tongue as long as I could, but now my father and I must have an explanation The fact of his fainting at the sight of this cross makes me suspicious, and the fact that Eva wants to investigate the case makes me afraid of what may come out"

"Has the cross anything to do with the affair?"

"Heaven, whose symbol it is, only knows,' said the young man gloomily "Mother, I am moving in the darkness, and I dread to come into the light If I undertake this search I may be able to save my father'

'From what—from—from—"

Allen nodded and sank his voice "It may even come to that Listen, mother, I'll tell you what I know On that night I went to the Red Deeps to prove the falsity of Eva's dream I found it only too true

"But you never go to the Red Deeps,' said Mrs Hill, looking steadily into her son's face "you sprained your ankle'

"So I did but that was after I knew the truth'

"What truth?"

"That Eva's dream was true, that her father was lying dead by the spring of the Red Deeps"

Mrs Hill looked still more searchingly at him "You saw that'

'I did in the twilight I reached there before it grew very dark I found the body, and, as in Eva's dream, I recognised it by the gloved right hand——

"The wooden hand," moaned Mrs Hill, rocking herself "Oh heaven!"

"Yes! The whiteness of the glove caught my eyes From what Eva had told me, I had no need to guess who was the dead man The wooden hand explained all The corpse was that of Stiode shot through the heart"

"But there was a slight flesh wound on the arm, remember," said Mrs Hill

"I know, but I did not notice that at the time," said Allen quickly "At first, mother, I intended to give the alarm, and I was hurrying back to Wargrove to tell Wasp and Jackson, when I caught sight of a revolver lying in the mud I took it up—there was a name on the silver plate on the butt It was——' Allen sank his voice still lower "It was my own name'

"The revolver was yours?"

'Yes I brought it with me from South America, and kept it in my portmanteau, since a weapon is not needed in England But one day I took it out to shoot some birds and left it in this library I never thought about it again, or I should have put it away The next sight I got of it was in the Red Deeps, and I thought—'

"That your father took it to shoot Stiode!" burst out Mrs Hill "You can't be certain of that you can't be certain No, no, Lawrence!" again he heard the unaccustomed name 'Lawrence would never commit a murder—so good—so kind—no, no"

Allen looked surprised He never expected his mother to stand up for his father in this way Hill, so far as the son had seen, was not kind to any one, and he certainly was not good Why Mrs Hill, who seemed to have no particular affection for him, should defend him in this way puzzled the young man She saw the effect her speech had produced and beckoned Allen to sit down "You must know all,' she said—"you must know how I came to marry your father, and then you will know why I speak as I do, Allen" She laid a trembling hand on his shoulder "You never thought I was fond of your father?"

Allen looked embarrassed "Well, no, mother I thought you tolerated him You have strength to rule the house and the whole county if you chose to exert it, but you let my father indulge in his whims and fancies, and allow him to speak to you, as he

certainly should not do Oftentimes I have been inclined to interfere when hearing how disrespectfully he speaks, but you have always either touched me, or have given me a look"

"I would let no one lay a finger on your father, Allen, no one—let alone his son I don't love your father, I never did, but" she drew herself up —"I respect him"

The young man looked aghast "I don't see how any one can respect him," he said "Heaven only knows I should like to be proud of my father, but with his eccentricities——"

"They cover a good heart"

"Well, mother, you know best," said Allen soothingly He did not think his father possessed a good heart by any manner of means The young fellow was affectionate, but he was also keen sighted, and Mr Hill had never commanded his respect in any way

"I *do* know best" said Mrs Hill in a strong tone, and looked quite commanding "Allen, are you aware why I am so fond of Eva?"

"Because she is the most charming girl in the world," said the lover fondly "Who could help being fond of Eva?"

"Women are not usually fond of one another to that extent," said Mrs Hill drily, "and a mother does not always love the girl who is likely to take her son away No, Allen, I don't love Eva so much for her own sake as because she is the daughter of Robert Strode"

"I thought you disliked him you said he was not a good man"

"Neither he was, Allen He was the worst of men—but I loved him all the same I should have married him, but for a trouble that came I have never told any one what I am about to tell you, but you *must* know I don't believe your father killed Strode, and you must do your best to keep him out of the investigation With your father's sensitive nature he would go mad if he were accused of such a crime"

"But my revolver being found in——"

"That can be explained," said Mrs Hill imperiously "I shall ask Harold"—she went back to the old name, being calmer. "I shall ask him myself to explain He is innocent He is whimsical and strange but he would not kill a fly He is too good-hearted"

Allen wondered more and more that his mother should be so blind "I am waiting to hear," he said resignedly

"You will not repeat what I say to Eva?"

"To no one, mother Great heavens, do you think I would?"

"If you took after your father, poor, babbling soul, you would"

"Ah," Allen kissed her hand, "but I am your own son and know how to hold my tongue Come, mother, tell me all"

"Then don't interrupt till I end, then you can make your comments, Allen" She settled herself and began to speak slowly "Both my parents died when I was a young girl, and like Eva Strode I was left without a penny I was taken into the house of Lord Ipsen as a nursery governess——"

"What! Eva's mother"

"I did not teach her, as she was my own age, but I taught her younger brother who afterwards died You promised not to interrupt, Allen Well, I was comparatively happy there, but Lady Ipsen did not like me We got on badly There was a large house-party at the family seat in Buckinghamshire, and I was there with my charge Amongst the guests were Mr Strode and your father They were both in love with Lady Jane Delham"

"What! my father also? I never knew——"

"You shall never know if you interrupt," said his mother imperiously, "wait and listen. I loved Mr. Strode, but as he was favoured by Lady Jane I saw there was no chance for me Your father then had not come in for

his money, and his father, ambitious and rich, was anxious that he should make an aristocratic match That was why he asked Lady Jane to be his wife She refused, as she loved Robert Strode I felt very miserable, Allen, and as your father was miserable also, he used to console me He was much appreciated for his talents in the house, and as he was a great friend of Mr Strode's his lack of birth was overlooked Not that I think Lord Ipsen would have allowed him to marry Lady Jane But he never guessed that Harold lifted his eyes so high Well, things were in this position when the necklace was lost—yes, the necklace belonging to Lady Ipsen, a family heirloom valued at ten thousand pounds It was taken out of the safe' Mrs Hill dropped her eyes and added in a low voice, 'I was accused'

Allen could hardly believe his ears, and rose filled with indignation "Do you mean to say that any one dared to accuse you?"

'Lady Ipsen did She never liked me, and made the accusation She declared that she left the key of the safe in the school room As I was very poor, she insisted that I had taken it As it happened I did go to London shortly after the robbery and before it was found out Lady Ipsen said that I went to pawn the necklace I could not prove my innocence, but the Earl interfered and stood by me He insisted that the charge was ridiculous, and made the detectives which Lady Ipsen had called in, drop the investigation I was considered innocent by all save Lady Ipsen The necklace was never found, and has not been to this day I was discharged with hardly a penny in my pocket and certainly with no friend In spite of people saying I was innocent I could not get another situation I should have starved, Allen, and was starving in London when your father came like an angel of light and—married me"

'Married you? Did he love you?"

"No, he loved Lady Jane, but she married Mr Strode But your father was so angered at what he considered an unjust charge being made against me, that he risked his father's wrath and made me his wife"

"It was noble of him," said Allen, "but——"

"It was the act of a saint!" cried Mrs Hill, rising 'His father cut him off with a shilling for what he did I was penniless, deserted, alone I would have died but for Lawrence He came—I did not love him, nor he me, but I respect him for having saved a broken-hearted woman from a doom worse than death Allen, Allen, can I ever repay your father for his noble act? Can you wonder that I tolerate his whims—that I let him do what he likes? He saved me he surrendered all for me"

"He did act well," admitted Allen, puzzled to think that his whimsical, frivolous father should act so nobly, 'but you made him happy, mother There is something to be said on your side"

"Nothing! nothing!" cried Mrs Hill with the martyr instinct of a noble woman "he gave up all for me His father relented after a time, and he inherited a fortune, but for a year we almost starved together He married me when I was under a cloud I can never repay him, never, never, I tell you, Allen" she said, facing him with clenched fists, "if I thought that he committed this crime, I would take the blame on myself rather than let him suffer He saved me Shall I not save him?"

Was the person who stole the necklace ever discovered, mother?'

'No, the necklace vanished and has never been found to this day I met Lady Jane Strode when she came here She did not believe me to be guilty, and we were good friends So you see, Allen, it is small wonder that I let your father do what he likes Why should I cross the desires of a man who behaved so nobly? Sometimes I do interfere, as you know, for

at times Harold needs guidance—but only rarely'

"Well, mother, I understand now, and can say nothing But as to how the revolver came to the Red Deeps — "

"Your father shall explain," said Mrs Hill moving to the door, "come with me

The two went to the room at the back of the house where Hill had lain down It was one of the Greek apartments where the little man sometimes took his siesta But the graceful couch upon which Allen had left him lying an hour previous was empty, and the window was open to the Roman colonnade There was no sign of Mr Hill

"He must have gone into the garden," said the wife and stepped out

But there was no sign of him there The gardener was working in the distance, and Mrs Hill asked him where his master was

"Gone to London ma'am, was the unexpected answer 'Jacobs drove him to the Westhaven Station'

Allen and his mother looked at one another with dread in their eyes This sudden departure was ominous in the extreme

CHAPTER XI

ALLEN AS A DETECTIVE

Mr Hill left no message behind him with the groom Jacobs returned and said that his master had gone to London, he did not state when he would return Allen and his mother were much perplexed by this disappearance It looked very much like a flight from justice, but Mrs Hill could not be persuaded to think ill of the man to whom she owed so much Like many women she took too humble an attitude on account of the obligation she had incurred. Yet Mrs Hill was not humble by nature

"What will you do now, Allen?" she asked the next morning

"I intend to learn why Cain sent that parcel to my father If he can explain I may find out why my father is afraid"

"I don't think he is afraid," insisted Mrs Hill, much troubled

"It looks very like it," commented her son "however, you had better tell the servants that father has gone to London on business I expect he will come back He can't stop away indefinitely"

"Of course he'll come back and explain everything Allen, your father is whimsical I always admitted that, but he has a heart of gold All that is strange in his conduct he will explain on his return"

"Even why he took my revolver to the Red Deeps?" said Allen grimly

"Whatever he took it for it was for no ill purpose," said Mrs Hill "Perhaps he made an appointment to see Strode there If so I don't wonder he went armed for Strode was quite the kind of man who would murder him'

"In that case Mr Strode has fallen into his own trap However, I'll see what I can do

Be careful, Allen, your father's good name must not suffer"

"That is why I am undertaking the investigation," replied the young man, rising "Well mother, I am going to see Mrs Merry and ask where Cain is to be found The circus may have left Colchester"

"You might take the brown paper that was round the box," suggested Mrs Hill "Mrs Merry may be able to say if the address is in her son's writing"

"I don't think it is—the hand is a most illiterate one Cain knows how to write better I have seen his letters to Eva

"What!" cried Mrs Hill, scandalised, "does she let a lad in that position write to her?"

"Cain is Eva's foster-brother, mother," said Allen dryly, "and she is the only one who can manage him."

"He's a bad lot like his father was before him," muttered Mrs Hill, and then went to explain to the servants that Mr Hill would be absent for a few days.

Allen walked to Misery Castle, and arrived there just before midday. For some time he had been strolling on the common wondering how to conduct his campaign. He was new to the detective business and did not very well know how to proceed. At first he had been inclined to seek professional assistance, but on second thoughts he decided to take no one into his confidence for the present. He decided what he might learn concerning his father's connection with the crime, as he by no means shared his mother's good opinion of Mr Hill. Allen and his father had never got on well together, as their natures were diametrically opposed to each other. Allen had the steady good sense of his mother, while the father was gay and light and aspiringly frivolous. Had not Mrs Hill thought herself bound, out of gratitude, to live with the man who had done so much for her, and because of her son Allen, she certainly would not have put up with such a trying husband for so many years. Allen was always impatient of his father's ways, and absence only confirmed him in the view he took of his evergreen sire. He could scarcely believe that the man was his father, and always felt relieved when out of his presence. However, he determined to do his best to get to the bottom of the matter. He could not believe that Mr Hill had fired the fatal shot, but fancied the little man had some knowledge of who had done so. And whether he was an accessory before or after the fact was equally unpleasant.

On arriving at Mrs Merry's abode he was greeted by that good lady with the news that Eva had gone to spend the day with Mrs Palmer. "To get used to her, as you might say," said Mrs Merry. "Oh, Mr Allen, dear," she spoke with the tears streaming down her withered face, "oh, whatever shall I do without my deary?"

"You'll see her often," said Allen soothingly.

"It won't be the same," moaned Mrs Merry. "It's like marrying a daughter, not that I've got one, thank heaven—it's never the same."

"Well, well—don't cry, there's a good soul. I have come to see you about Cain."

Mrs Merry gave a screech. "He's in gaol! I see it in your eyes! Oh, well I knew he'd get there!"

"He hasn't got there yet," said the young man impatiently, "come into the drawing room. I can explain."

"Is it murder or poaching or burglary?" asked Mrs Merry, still bent on believing Cain was in trouble, "or horse stealing, seeing he's in a circus?"

"It's none of the three," said Allen, sitting down and taking the brown paper wrapping out of his pocket. "Tim Wasp saw him in Colchester, and he's quite well."

"And what's she been calling on my son there, I'd like to know?" asked Mrs Merry, bridling. "He shan't marry her, though he says he loves her, which I don't believe. To be united with that meddlesome Wasp policeman. No, Mr Allen, never, whatever you may say."

"You can settle that yourself. All I wish to know is this," he spread out the paper. "Do you know whose writing this is?"

Mrs Merry, rather surprised, bent over the paper, and began to spell out the address with one finger. "Lawrence Hill," she said, "ah, they used to call your father that in the old days. I never hear him called so now."

"Never mind. What of the writing?"

Mrs Merry looked at it at a distance, held it close to her nose, and then tilted it sideways. All the time her

face grew paler and paler Then she took an envelope out of her pocket and glanced from the brown paper to the address Suddenly she gave a cry, and threw her apron over her head. "Oh, Giles—Giles—whatever have you bin up to!"

"What do you mean?" asked Allen, feeling inclined to shake her

"It's Giles's writing," sobbed Mrs Merry, still invisible, "whatever you may say it's his own writing, he never having been to school and writing pot-hooks and hangers awful" She tore the apron from her face and pointed, "Look at this Lawrence, and at this, my name on the envelope He wrote, saying he's coming here to worry me, and I expect he's sent to your pa saying the same They was thick in the old days, the wicked old days," said Mrs Merry with emphasis, "I mean your pa and him as is dead and my brute of a Giles"

"So Giles Merry wrote this?" said Allen thoughtfully, looking at the brown paper writing I wonder if the cross is a sign between my father and him, which has called my father to London"

"Have you seen Giles, sir?" asked Mrs Merry doleful, "if so, tell him I'll bolt and bar the house and have a gun ready I won't be struck and bullied and badgered out of my own home"

"I haven't seen your husband," explained Allen, rising, "this parcel was sent to my father by your son through Jane Wasp"

Mrs. Merry gave another cry "He's got hold of Cain—oh, and Cain said he hadn't set eyes on him He's ruined!" Mrs Merry flopped into a chair "My son's ruined—oh, and he was my pride! But that wicked father of his would make Heaven the other place he would."

"I suppose Cain must have got the parcel from his father?" said Allen

"He must have It's in Giles's writing What was in the parcel, sir?"

"A cross made of two sticks tied with a piece of grass Do you know what that means?"

"No, I don't, but if it comes from Giles Merry, it means some wicked thing, you may be sure, Mr Allen, whatever you may say"

"Well, my father was much upset when he got this parcel and he has gone to London"

"To see Giles?" asked Mrs Merry

"I don't know The parcel came from Colchester"

"Then Giles is there, and with my poor boy," cried Mrs Merry, trembling "Oh, when will my cup of misery be full? I always expected this"

"Don't be foolish, Mrs Merry. If your husband comes you can show him the door"

"He'd show me his boot," retorted Mrs Merry "I've a good mind to sell up, and clear out If twasn't for Miss Eva, I would And there, I've had to part from her on account of Giles If he came and made the house, what he do make it, which is the pit of Tophet, a nice thing it would be for Miss Eva"

"I'll break his head if he worries Eva," said Allen grimly, "I've dealt before with that sort of ruffian But I want you to tell me where Cain is to be heard of I expect the circus has left Colchester by this time"

"Cain never writes to me he being a bad boy," wailed Mrs Merry, "an' now as his father's got hold of him he'll be worse nor ever But you can see in the papers where the play-actors go, sir"

"To be sure," said Allen, "how stupid I am! Well, good-day, Mrs. Merry, and don't tell Miss Eva anything of this"

"Not if I was tortured into slices," said Mrs Merry, walking to the door with Allen, "ah, it's a queer world. I hope I'll go to my long home soon, sir, and then I'll be where Merry will never come You may be sure they won't let *him* in"

This view of the case appeared to afford Mrs Merry much satisfaction,

and she chuckled as Allen walked away He went along the road wondering at the situation His father was not a good husband to his mother—at least Allen did not think so Giles was a brute to his wife, and the late Mr Strode from all accounts had been a neglectful spouse "And they were all three boon companions," said Allen to himself, "I wonder what I'll find out about the three? Perhaps Giles has a hand in the death of Strode At all events the death has been caused by some trouble of the past God forgive me for doubting my father, but I dread to think of what I may learn if I go on with the case But for my mother's sake I *must* go on"

Allen now directed his steps to Wasp's abode, as he knew at this hour the little policeman would be at home It struck Allen that it would be just as well to see the bullet which had pierced the heart of Mr Strode If it was one from his own revolver and Allen knew the shape of its bullets well—there would be no doubt as to his father's guilt But Allen fancied that from the feeble nature of the wound on the arm, it was just the kind of shaky arm which would be taken by a timid man like his father Perhaps (this was Allen's theory) the three companions of old met at the Red Deeps —Mr Strode, Giles, and his father Mr Hill, in a fit of rage, might have fired the shot which nipped the arm, but Giles must have been the one who shot Strode through the heart Of course Allen had no grounds to think in this way, and it all depended on the sight of the bullet in the possession of Wasp as to the truth of the theory Allen intended to get Wasp out of the room on some pretext and then fit the bullet into his weapon. He had it in his pocket for the purpose This was the only way in which he could think of solving the question as to his father's guilt or innocence.

Wasp was at home partaking of a substantial dinner. Some of the children sat round, and Mrs Wasp, a grenadier of a woman, was at the head of the table. But three children sat out with weekly journals on their laps, and paper and pencil in hand They all three looked worried. After greeting Allen, Wasp explained

"There's a prize for guessing the names of European capitals," he said, "it's given in the *Weekly Star*, and I've set them to work to win the prize They're working at it now, and don't get food till each gets at least two capitals They must earn money somehow, sir"

"And they've been all the morning without getting one, sir," said Mrs Wasp plaintively Apparently her heart yearned over her three children, who looked very hungry "Don't you think they might eat now in honour of the gentleman's visit?"

"Silence!" cried Wasp, "sit down. No talking in the ranks Wellington, Kitchener, and Boadicea"—these were the names of the unhappy children—"must do their duty Named after generals, sir," added Wasp with pride

"Was Boadicea a general?" asked Allen, sorry for the unfortunate trio, who were very eagerly searching for the capitals in a school atlas

"A very good one for a woman sir, as I'm informed by Marlborough, my eldest, sir, as is at a board school Boadicea, if you don't know the capital of Bulgaria you get no dinner"

Boadicea whimpered, and Allen went over to the three, his kind heart aching for their hungry looks "Sofia is the capital Put it down"

"Right, sir," said Wasp in a military fashion, "put down Sofia"

"What capital are you trying to find, Wellington?" asked Allen

"Spain, sir, and Kitchener is looking for Victoria"

"The Australian country, sir, not Her late Majesty," said Wasp smartly

"Madrid is the capital of Spain, and Melbourne that of Victoria"

The children put these down hastily and simply leaped for the table

"Silence!" cried the policeman, horrified at this hurry, "say grace"

The three stood up and recited grace like a drill sergeant shouting the standing orders for the day Shortly, then jaws were at work Wasp surveyed the family grimly, saw they were orderly, and then turned to his visitor

"Now, Mr Allen, sir, I am at your disposal" Come into the parlour'

He led the way with a military step, and chuckles broke out amongst the family relieved of his presence When in the small room and the door closed, Allen came artfully to the subject of his call It would not do to let Wasp suspect his errand Certainly the policeman had overcome his suspicion that Allen was concerned in the matter, but a pointed request for the bullet might renewaken them Wasp was one of those hasty people who jump to conclusions unsupported by facts

"Wasp,' said Allen, sitting down under a portrait of Lord Roberts, "Miss Strode and myself are engaged as you know"

"Yes, sir' Wasp standing stiffly saluted "I give you joy

"Thank you We have been talking over the death of her father, and she is anxious to learn who killed him"

"Natural enough," said the policeman, scratching his chin, "but it is not easy to do that especially'—Wasp looked sly—"as there is no reward."

"Miss Strode is not in a position to offer a reward," replied Allen, "so, for her sake, I am undertaking the search I may want your assistance, Wasp, and I am prepared to pay you for the same I am not rich, but if ten pounds would be of any use——'

"If you'd a family of ten sir, you'd know as it would,' said Wasp, looking gratified 'I'm not a haggler, Mr Allen, but with bread so dear, and my children being large eaters, I'm willing to give you information for twenty pounds"

"I can't afford that," said Allen decidedly

"I can tell you something about Butsey," said Wasp eagerly

"Ten pounds will pay you for your trouble," replied Allen, "and remember Wasp, if you don't accept the offer and find the culprit on your own, there will be no money coming from the Government"

"There will be promotion, though, Mr Allen," said Wasp, drawing himself up, "and that means a larger salary. Let us say fifteen"

"Very good, though you drive a hard bargain When the murderer is laid by the heels I'll pay you fifteen pounds No, Wasp," he added, seeing what the policeman was about to say, "I can't give you anything on account Well, is it a bargain?"

"It must be, as you won't do otherwise,' said Wasp unfully 'What do you want to know?"

"Tell me about this boy'

"Butsey' Wasp produced a large note book 'I went to Westhaven to see if there was truth in that Sunday school business she told me about when I met him Mr Allen, there is no Sunday school, but there was a treat arranged for children from London

"Something of the Fresh Air Fund business?"

"That's it sir This was a private business from some folk as do kindnesses in Whitechapel A lot of children came down on Wednesday——"

Allen interrupted "That was the day Mr Strode came down?"

"Yes sir, and on that night he was shot at the Red Deeps Well, sir, Butsey must have been with the ragged children as he looks like that style of urchin But I can't be sure of this The children slept at Westhaven and went back on Thursday night"

"And Butsey saw Mrs Merry in the morning of Thursday?'

"He did, sir, and me later Butsey I fancy didn't go back till Saturday But I can't be sure of this"

"You don't seem to be sure of anything," said Allen tartly. "Well, I

can't say your information is worth much, Wasp"

"Hold on, sir I've got the address of the folk in Whitechapel who brought the children down If you look them up, they may know something of Butsey"

"True enough Give me the address"

Wasp consented, and wrote it out in a stiff military hand, while Allen went on artfully, "Was any weapon found at the Red Deeps?"

"No sir," said Wasp, handing his visitor the address of the Whitechapel Mission, which Allen put in his pocket book "I wish the revolver had been found and then we'd see if the bullet fitted"

"Only one bullet was found"

"Only one, sir Dr Grace got it out of the body It is the bullet which caused the death, and I got Inspector Grant to leave it with me Perhaps you'd like to see it, sir?"

"Oh don't trouble," said Allen carelessly I can't say anything about it, Wasp"

"Being a gentleman as has travelled you might know something, Mr Allen," said Wasp, and went to a large tin box, which was inscribed with his name and the number of his former regiment, in white letters From this he took out a packet and opening it, extracted a small twist of paper Then he placed the bullet in Allen's hand

"I should think it came from a Derringer," said Wasp

Allen's heart leaped, for his revolver was not a Derringer He turned the bullet in his hand carelessly "It might" he said with a shrug "Pity the other bullet wasn't found"

"The one as ripped the arm, sir? It's buried in some tree trunk, I guess, Mr Allen But it would be the same size as this. Both were fired from the same barrel First shot missed, but the second did the business Hold on, sir, I've got a drawing of the Red Deeps, and I'll show you where we found the corpse," and Wasp left the room

Allen waited till the door was closed, then hastily took the revolver from his breast-pocket He tried the bullet, but it proved to be much too large for the revolving barrel, and could not have been fired therefrom "Thank heaven," said Allen, with a sigh of relief, "my father is innocent"

CHAPTER XII

LORD SALTARS

MRS PALMER dwelt in a large and imposing house, some little distance from the village, and standing back a considerable way from the Shanton Road It had a park of fifteen acres filled with trees, smooth lawns, a straight avenue, imposing iron gates, and a lodge, so that it was quite an impressive mansion The building itself was square of two stories, painted white, and had many windows with green shutters It somewhat resembled an Italian villa, and needed sunshine to bring out its good points, but in wet weather it looked miserable and dreary It was elevated on a kind of mound, and a stone terrace ran round the front and the side At the back were large gardens and ranges of hot-houses Everything was kept as neat as a new pin, for Mrs Palmer had many servants Being rich, she could afford to indulge her fancies, and made full use of her money

"La, dear," said Mrs Palmer, when Eva was settled with her as companion, "what's the use of five thousand a year if you don't make yourself comfortable? I was brought up in a shabby way, as poor dead pa was a small—very small—chemist at Shanton. Palmer had his shop in Westhaven and was also in a grubbing way of business till people took to coming to Westhaven. Then property rose in value, and Palmer made money He

used to call on pa and commiserate with him about the dull trade in Shanton, where people were never sick He advised him to move to Westhaven, but pa, losing heart after the death of ma, would not budge Then Palmer proposed to me, and though I was in love with Jimmy Eccles at the Bank, I thought I'd marry money Oh, dear me,' sighed Mrs Palmer looking very pretty and placid, "so here I am a widow"

"A happy widow," said Eva, smiling

"I don't deny that, dear Though, to be sure, the death of poor pa, and of Palmer, were blows I was fond of both Jimmy Eccles wanted to marry me when Palmer went, but I sent him off with a flea in his ears It was only my money he wanted Now he's married a freckled-faced girl, whose pa is a draper"

"I suppose you will marry again, Mrs Palmer?"

"I suppose I will, when I get the man to suit But I do wish, Eva dear, you would call me Constance I'm sure you might, after being three days in the house Call me Constance, and I'll tell you something which will please you"

"What is it, Constance?"

"There's a dear I shan't tell you yet—it's a surprise, and perhaps you may be angry with me But some one is coming to dinner"

"Allen?" asked Eva, her face lighting up

"No! He's in town At least you told me so"

Eva nodded "Yes, he went up to town last week, after seeing Wasp"

"About that horrid murder?"

"Certainly Allen is trying to learn who killed my father."

"It's very good of him," said the widow, fanning herself vigorously. "and I'm sure I hope he'll find out. The man who shot Mr Strode should be hanged, or we won't sleep in our beds safe. Why, Eva, you have no idea how I tremble here at nights. This is a lonely house, and these holiday trippers may bring down burglars amongst them"

"I don't think you need fear, Constance There have been no burglars down here Besides, you have a footman, and a coachman, and a gardener With three men you are quite safe"

"I'm sure I hope so, dear But one never knows When do you expect Mr Hill back?"

"In a few days I don't know what he's doing He refuses to tell me anything until he finds some definite clue But I have his address, and can write to him when I want to"

"His father is in town also—so Mrs Hill told me

"Yes Mr Hill went up before Allen I believe he has gone to some sale to buy ancient musical instruments"

"Dear me,' said Mrs Palmer "what rubbish that man does spend his money on What's the use of buying instruments you can't play on? I dare say he'll try to, though for Mr Hill is the quietest man I ever set eyes on"

"He is strange," said Eva gravely She did not wish to tell Mrs Palmer that she disliked the little man, for after all he was Allen's father, and there was no need to say anything "But Mr Hill is very clever"

"So they say But he worries me He's always got some new idea in his head I think he changes a thousand times a day Mrs Merry doesn't like him, but then she likes no one, not even me"

"Poor nurse," said Eva sadly, "she has had an unhappy life"

"I don't think you have had bright one, dear; but you shall have if I can make it so Are you sure you have everything you want?"

"Everything," said Eva affectionately, "you are more than kind, Mrs.——"

"*Constance!*" cried the pretty widow in a high key

"Constance, of course But tell me your surprise."

Mrs Palmer began to fidget "I don't know if you will be pleased, after all, Eva But if you don't like to meet him say you have a headache, and I'll entertain him myself"

"Who is it?" asked Eva, surprised at this speech.

"Lord Saltars," said Mrs Palmer in a very small voice, and not daring to look at her companion

Miss Strode did not reply at once She was ill-pleased that the man should come to the house, because she did not wish to meet him Her mother's family had done nothing for her, and even when she lost her father, Saltars, although in the neighbourhood, had not been kind enough to call Eva met him once, and, as she had told Mrs Palmer, did not like his free and easy manner However, it was not her place to object to Saltars coming This was not her house, and she was merely a paid companion This being the case, she overcame her momentary resentment and resolved to make the best of the position She did this the more specially as she knew that Mrs Palmer had only been actuated in inviting Saltars by her worship of rank "I shall be quite pleased to meet my cousin," said Eva

"I hope you are not annoyed, Eva"

"I am not exactly pleased, but this is your house, and——"

"Oh, please—please don't speak like that," cried the widow, "you make me feel so cheap And the fact is—I may as well confess it—Lord Saltars, knowing you were with me, for I told my Shanton friends and they told him, asked if I would invite him to dinner"

"To meet me, I suppose?"

"I fancy so But why don't you like him, Eva? He's a very nice man"

"Not the kind of man I care about," replied Eva, rising, "however, Mrs. Palmer, I'll meet him It's time to dress now." She glanced at the clock. "At what time does he arrive?"

"At seven He's at Shanton"

"Ah! Is the circus there again?"

"Yes It is paying a return visit But I know you're angry with me, dear—you call me Mrs Palmer"

"Very well, then, Constance," said Eva, and kissing the pouting widow she escaped to her own room.

Mrs Palmer was kind and generous, and made her position more pleasant than she expected But Mrs Palmer was also foolish in many ways, particularly in her worship of rank Because Lord Saltars had a title she was willing to overlook his deficiencies, though he was neither intellectual nor amusing Eva really liked Mrs Palmer and felt indebted to her, but she wished the widow's good taste had led her to refuse Saltars permission to call But there—as Mrs Merry would say—Mrs Palmer not being a gentlewoman had no inherent good taste But for her kind heart she would have been intolerable However, Eva hoped to improve her into something better, by gentle means, though Constance with her loud tastes and patent tuft-hunting was a difficult subject

As she was in mourning for her father, Eva dressed in the same black gauze gown in which she had hoped to welcome him, but without any touch of colour on this occasion As she went down the stairs, she hoped that Mrs Palmer would be in the room to welcome her noble visitor, so as to save the embarrassment of a *tête-à-tête* But Mrs Palmer was one of those women who never know the value of time, and when Eva entered the drawing-room she found herself greeted by a short, square-built jovial-looking man of forty Saltars was perfectly dressed and looked a gentleman, but his small grey eyes, his red, clean-shaven face and remarkably closely clipped hair did not, on the whole, make up a good-looking man As soon as he saw Eva, he strolled forward calmly and eyed her critically.

"How are you, Miss Strode?—or shall I say Cousin Eva?"

"I think Miss Strode is sufficient," said Eva, seating herself. "I am sorry Mrs. Palmer is not down yet."

"By Jove, I'm not," said Saltars, taking possession of a near chair. "I want to have a talk with you."

"This is hardly the hour or the place."

"Come now, Miss Strode—if you will insist on being so stiff—you needn't be too hard on a chap. I know I should have called, and I quite intended to do so, but I had reasons— —"

"I don't ask for your reasons, Lord Saltars."

The man clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "We don't seem to get on," he said at length, "yet I wish to be friendly. See here, I want my mother to call and see you."

"If Lady Ipsen calls I shall be pleased."

"In a society way, but you won't be heart-pleased."

"No," said Eva, very decidedly, "how can you expect me to? Your family has not treated me or my dead father well."

"Your father ——" Saltars clicked again and seemed on the point of saying something uncomplimentary of the dead, but a gleam in his companion's eye made him change his mind. "I know you've been a bit neglected, and I'm very sorry it should be so," said he bluntly. "I assure you that it was always my wish you should be invited to stop with us in Buckinghamshire. And my father was in favour of it too."

"But Lady Ipsen wasn't," said Eva coolly, "don't trouble to apologise, Lord Saltars, I should not have gone in any case."

"No, by Jove, I can see that. You're as proud as a peacock—just like the portrait of Lady Barbara Delham who lived in Queen Anne's reign. And she was a Tartar."

Eva began to smile. Saltars was amusing. She saw that he was simply a thoughtless man, who lived for himself alone. He apparently wished to be friendly, so as Eva had no real grudge against him, she unbent.

"I don't think we need quarrel," she said.

"No, by Jove. But I shan't. Any quarrelling that is to be done must be on your side. There's enough in our family as it is. You should hear how my mother and the dowager Lady Ipsen fight. But then the dowager is 'a dreadful old cat,' he finished candidly.

"I have never seen her."

"You wouldn't forget her if you did. She's beaked like a parrot, and talks like one. She and I don't hit it off. She's one of what they call the old school, whatever that means, and she thinks I'm a low person, like a groom. What do you think?"

Lord Saltars was not unlike a groom in some ways, but his good nature and candour amused Eva. "I am not a person to judge," she said, smiling.

"By Jove, you might have been, though," said he, fixing his small grey eyes on her, "supposing you became Lady Saltars?"

"There's not the slightest chance of that," said Eva coldly.

"There isn't now, but there might have been. And after all, why not now, if things are what your father said they were?"

Miss Strode drew herself up. She thought he was going too far. "I really don't know what you mean. I am engaged to be married."

"I know, to a fellow called Hil. Your father told me."

"Lord Saltars, did you meet my father after he came home?"

"Of course I did. He called to see me when he came to London, and corresponded with me long before that. I say, do you remember when I came to see you at Wargrove?"

"Yes. We did not get on well together."

"By Jove, no more we did! That

was a pity, because I came to see what kind of a wife you'd make"

"You're very kind," said Eva, indignantly, "but I'm not on the market to be examined like a horse"

"Haw—haw," laughed the other, slapping his knee, "that's the kind of thing the dowager would say Don't get waxy, Eva—Miss Strode then, though I wish you'd call me Herbert and I'd call you Eva"

"I shall call you Lord Saltars"

"Saltars without the confounded lord," urged the man pertinaciously

"No, go on What were you saying? Yes, that you came to see what sort of a wife I'd make Who told you to?"

"Your father"

"I don't believe it"

"It's true, though Your father wanted you to marry me He kept writing to me from South Africa to keep me up to the scratch, and said he was gathering a fortune for us both When he came home he called on me and told me you had some folly in your head about this chap Hill, and——"

Eva rose indignantly, "Lord Saltars," she said calmly and distinctly, "I don't allow any one to talk to me in this way My engagement to Mr Allen Hill is not a folly And I don't see why my father should have talked to you about it"

"Because he wanted me to marry you," said Saltars, rising and following her to the fireplace

Eva placed one slippered foot on the fender, and an elbow on the mantelpiece She looked angry, but extremely pretty and well-bred Saltars adopted the same attitude opposite her, and looked more like a groom than ever But the expression of his face was so good-natured that Eva could not feel as angry as she ought to have done

"I should never have married you," she said, her colour deepening "I understand that you have other views"

Saltars grew red in his turn "It's that boy Cain's been talking," he said, "I'll break his head"

"That is for you and Cain to decide," said Miss Strode indifferently, "but you can quite understand why I don't discuss these things"

Saltars kicked the fender sulkily "I wish you would be more friendly, Eva," he said "I need a friend, and so, by Jove, do you"

"How can I befriend you?"

"Well, I'm in love with Miss Lorry, and there will be a shine if I marry her She's perfectly straight and——"

"I don't want to hear about her," said Eva angrily, "and if you were a gentleman you wouldn't talk to me of that sort of person"

"She's a perfectly decent sort," said Saltars, angry in his turn, "I intend to make her my wife"

"That has nothing to do with me And I wish you'd drop this conversation, Lord Saltars It doesn't interest me I am quite willing to be friends Your manner is absurd, but you mean well Come," and she held out her hand

Saltars took it with a long breath "Just like the dowager," said he, "just as nippy I'd like to see you have a turn up with old Lady Ipsen"

"Well, then," said Eva, "now we are friends and you promise not to talk nonsense to me tell me what you mean by my father making a fortune for me"

"For both of us, by Jove," said his lordship, "you were to be Lady Saltars, and then we were to have forty thousand pounds"

"But my father didn't leave me a penny," said Eva

"That's what I wish to see you about," said Saltars earnestly. "I heard from Mrs Palmer's friends that you were without money, and were her companion, so I wrote asking to come to-night I want to be your friend and help you You ought to have forty thousand pounds"

"How do you know that?"

"Because I saw your father twice

before he was killed within the last six weeks He told me that he had brought home forty thousand pounds Twice he told me that, but he did not say how it was invested I expect his lawyer, Mask, can tell you He's my lawyer too'

"Mr Mask told me that I inherited no money"

"Yet your father saw him," said the perplexed Saltars

"I know he did, but he said nothing about forty thousand pounds I know that he told Mr Mask he would place some money in his keeping, without mentioning the amount, but he never did so"

"Didn't you find the money in his portmanteau or box, or - - -?"

"We found nothing, nor did we find any papers mentioning that such a sum of money was in existence'

"Then he must have been robbed of it, when dead'

Eva shook her head "Nothing was taken out of his pockets His money, his jewellery, his watch nothing was taken'

"Queer,' said Saltars 'Did you find in his pockets a large blue pocket-book with his crest on it, stamped in gold?'

"No When did you see that?'

"When he was talking to me I was hard up I don't mind saying," said Saltars frankly, "that I'm always hard up As your father looked upon me as his intended son-in-law, he gave me a pony, and took the notes out of the blue pocket-book He carried his money there"

"He would scarcely carry forty thousand pounds there"

"No, but he might have carried a letter of credit for that amount Or at least he would have some memorandum of such a large sum. If any notes were stolen with the pocket book, you can trace those by the numbers when the murderer presents them, and then the beast will be caught But the forty thousand——"

"Stop—stop," said Eva, "my head is in a whirl Are you sure?"

"Perfectly, I was to marry you, and then we were to get the money. And I may tell you that your father said, more would come to us when he died. Depend upon it, Eva, the murder was committed for the sake of that money"

"I wonder if my father meant diamonds?" said Eva

Saltars started "By Jove, I shouldn't wonder," he said eagerly, "he would bring diamonds from South Africa as the easiest way to carry such a large sum Perhaps he had the diamonds in his pocket and they were stolen"

"I must tell Allen this"

"Who is Allen? -oh, young Hill! Don't deny it I can see it in your face, it's the lucky man And by Jove he is I don't see why I should surrender you Your father wished us to marry——"

"You go too fast, Lord Saltars Remember Miss Lorry"

Saltars would have said something more but that the door opened and Mrs Palmer, fastening her glove, sailed in "Not a word of the diamonds to any one," said Eva hurriedly

"Not a word,' said Saltars in a low voice, then raised it gaily—"How are you, Mrs Palmer? My cousin and I have been talking"—he looked at Eva inquiringly, his invention failing him "About—about——"

Chinese metaphysics," said the feminine intellect

CHAPTER XIII

THE OTHER WOMAN

LORD SALTARS spent a very enjoyable evening in the company of two pretty women. Eva had no chance of further conversation, as Mrs Palmer made the most of her noble guest She

sang to him, she chattered to him, she did all that a lively woman could do to amuse him In fact, it seemed to Eva as though the widow was trying to fascinate his lordship Saltars, no fool, saw this also

"But it won't do," chuckled the guest, as he drove back to Shanton in a smart dog cart "She's a pretty, saucy little woman that widow, and has money, too, though not enough for me to marry her on Then Eva's worth a dozen of her, for looks and breeding But then she's got no money, and I can't afford to marry poverty Of course that forty thousand pounds might turn up, but on the other hand it might not Finally, there's Bell Lorry! Ugh! his lordship shivered I'm not so gone on her as I was, yet there's something infernally taking about Bell She's a fine woman—with a temper But she's got no money, and no birth, and precious little character, I should say I'm not going to marry her, though she thinks so But it will be the deuce's own job to get rid of her!"

Saltars argued this way until he arrived at Shanton Then he delivered the reins to his groom at the door of the Queen's Hotel, where he was stopping, and rang the bell It was after twelve o'clock, and a fine starry night But the chill in the air made Saltars pull up the collar of his overcoat and grumble He was anxious for his bed and a glass of steaming grog He got the last, but he was prevented from getting to the first by reason of a visitor On ascending to his sitting-room he was met by a copy waiter

"Your lordship," said this individual, "there's a lady waiting to see your lordship in your lordship's room"

"What, at this hour! It's not respectable"

"So the landlady told her, your lordship, but she said that she would do what she liked, and threatened to make a scene Mrs. Cowper then thought it would be best to let her stay. She's waiting upstairs—the lady, I mean, your lordship—and is in a fine rage"

"It sounds like Bell," thought Saltars, and dismissed the old waiter, who went back to tell the night-porter he was going to bed But the night-porter persuaded him to remain up for a time

"There's going to be a row with that wench," said the night-porter; "she's a circus-rider—Miss Lorry by name, and has a temper of her own I think she'll give it to his lordship hot I wonder Mrs Cowper don't object to such goings on"

So the two men, waiter and night porter, remained below while Saltars, fully aware from the description that his visitor was Miss Lorry, entered the room prepared for a storm The lady was seated in a chair near the table, and was drinking champagne which she had ordered at his expense She was a fine-looking woman of mature age, and was expensively dressed in blue silk Her arms and neck were bare, and she wore many jewels As she was of the lunoesque order of woman, she looked remarkably well Her cheeks were flushed but whether from the champagne or from rage it was impossible to say Probably a mixture of both gave her the high colour she wore, when she looked up to see Saltars enter

In spite of this description and of the lateness of the hour, and of the lady's loud manner, it must not be thought that Miss Lorry was anything but a thoroughly decent woman—if somewhat of a Bohemian She was known as an accomplished rider throughout the length and breadth of the three kingdoms, and no one had a word to say against her character She was certainly fond of wine, but kept her liking for that within due bounds, as a rule She was also kind-hearted, charitable, and generous Many a man and women connected with the circus, and with the sawdust profession as a whole, had cause to remember Miss Lorry's kind heart. Bohemian as she was, the woman

was really good and true and had many noble instincts. Saltars might have done worse than marry her, in spite of her birth, and profession, and years—for she certainly was older than he was But Saltars, with his shallow instincts, looked on the outward beauty of Bell Lorry somewhat coarsened by age and her hard life He had not the penetration to see the real, true, kindly, noble soul she possessed And then it must be confessed that Miss Lorry masked her many good qualities by indulging on the least provocation in royal rages When blind with passion, she was capable of anything

"Oh," said she, tossing her head, "so you're back!"

"Just so," replied Saltars, taking off his overcoat and tossing it on to the sofa. "I didn't expect to find you here—it's after twelve—really you should not, you know, for your own sake People will talk, and the landlady here is no angel"

Miss Lorry snapped her fingers and drank some wine "That for the landlady," she said coolly, "so long as my conscience is clear, I'm not afraid of what people say And I couldn't go to bed without seeing you The circus leaves for Chelmsford to-morrow"

"But you needn't go with it," said Saltars, lighting a cigarette "I dare-say we can have a talk to-morrow before you go?"

"We must have a talk to-night and an understanding too," snapped the woman, her eyes blazing "Look here, Lord Saltars, what do you mean by going after that girl?"

"What girl?" asked his lordship, taking a seat

"You know well enough You've been over to Wargrove to dine with that Mrs Palmer, and Miss Strode is with her as a companion"

"You seem to know all about it, Bell."

"Don't call me Bell. I've never given you permission to call me by my christian name. I always call you Lord Saltars and not Herbert. You can't say a word against me"

"I don't want to, but——"

"I shan't listen to your remarks," said Miss Lorry in a rage; "you think because I'm a circus-rider that I've got no pride and no decency But I'd have your lordship know that I'm a respectable woman, and there's no mud can be thrown at me You asked me to marry you, and I said I would Is that so?"

"Yes, but——"

"Hold your tongue If that is so, what right have you to go after that girl? She's a nice girl and a decent girl, and a lady, which I am not All the same, you shan't spoil her life"

Saltars raised his eyebrows "I have no intention of spoiling her life She's my cousin, if you remember——"

"Oh, I know But you're just the sort of man to make love to her, and break her heart And as you're engaged to marry me, I shan't have it So you look out, Mr Herbert Delham, or Lord Saltars, or whatever you call yourself"

"I wouldn't get in a rage over nothing, if I were you," said Saltars coolly, "and I shouldn't drink more of that wine either It only excites you Try this," he tossed her a cigarette, "it may calm your nerves"

"My nerves are my own to do what I like with And if you had my nerves you might talk It isn't a nervous woman who can ride and control a savage stallion like White Robin"

"That horse will kill you some day," said Saltars, "he's got the temper of a fiend"

"So have I when roused, so don't you make me angry."

"You're not very good-tempered now Try the cigarette."

"I'll smoke if you hand me one properly and light it for me. I do not take things thrown to me as if I were a dog"

Lord Saltars rose and produced another cigarette—the one he threw was lying on the table He offered

this to Miss Lorry with a bow, and then gravely lighted a match. In another minute the smoke was curling from her full lips, and she calmed down. Saltars returned to his seat and lighted a new roll of tobacco with the stump of his old cigarette "How did you know I went to Shanton to-night?"

"Cain told me Yes, and he told me about Miss Strode being Mrs Palmer's companion He went to-day to see his mother, with whom Miss Strode lived She—the mother, I mean—knew that you were going to Mrs Palmer's to-night, as Mrs Palmer told her"

"I wonder Mrs Palmer took the trouble," said Saltars coolly "My movements seem to interest her, and this Mrs Morry and Cain I'll break that young man's head if he spies on me"

"You'll have to reckon with Signor Antonio if you do, and, as he's the Strong Man of our show, you'll get the worst of it"

"Great strength doesn't usually mean science And I think I can put up my flippers with any man"

"You're a brute," said Miss Lorry, with an admiring glance at Saltars' sullen strength, which was what attracted her, "no one would take you to be a nobleman"

"As to Signor Antonio," went on Saltars, taking no notice of the compliment, "he's not an Italian in spite of his dark looks and broken English He's a half-bred gipsy mumper, and a blackguard at that You seem to know him pretty well, Miss Lorry I can't say I admire your choice of acquaintances."

"I know you," she retorted, "so you're the last person to talk As to Antonio, he's been with the show for years, and I'm always friendly with fellow artistes He's a brute, as you are but he daren't show his teeth to me."

"He shows them to Cain often enough"

"He's fond of the boy all the same, and he's the——" here Miss Lorry checked herself; "well it doesn't matter I didn't come here to talk about Antonio It's getting late, and I want to go to my room. I'm lodging in the next house."

"You should have left a message asking me to call"

"I dare say, and you'd have come, wouldn't you?"

"But here at this hour your reputation——"

"Leave my reputation alone," cried Miss Lorry in a rage, "it's better than yours I'd like to see any one say a word against me. I'd have the law of him or her—if you're thinking of that white-faced cat the landlady But see here, about Miss Strode——"

"Don't say anything about Miss Strode I called, as her cousin. There's no chance of my marrying her"

"Mr Strode said otherwise."

"You didn't know Strode," said Saltars, starting and looking puzzled.

"Oh, didn't I though?" jeered Miss Lorry, "well, I just did. Six years ago I knew him He came to the circus, behind the scenes, I mean, to see Signor Antonio He spotted Antonio performing in the ring and recognised an old friend So he called after the performance and was introduced to me I knew him again when he came to the circus when we were near London He came to see you then"

"I know he did Strode called at my digs and found from my man that I'd gone to the circus. As he wished to see me before he went to Wargrove, he followed me to the show But I didn't know you spoke to him, or even knew him"

"He came to see me on his own," said Miss Lorry, frowning, "when you were talking to Stag We had a conversation, and he said you were going to marry Miss Strode——"

"Well, I wasn't engaged to you then."

"You're not engaged now unless I

choose to," said the woman coolly, "but you were making love to me, and I told Mr Strode that I had a claim on you. He lost his temper and said you had promised to marry his daughter"

"If I had, I would hardly have proposed to you," said Saltars diplomatically

"Oh, I don't know You do exactly what suits you And if Mr Strode had lived he might have induced you to throw me over and marry Miss Strode But he's dead, whosoever killed him, poor man and you're engaged to me Do you intend to marry me or not?"

"Well I want to, but there's no money"

"How do you know there's no money? I've got my savings Yes, you may look, but I'm no spendthrift I have enough invested to bring me in five hundred a year, and many a year I've worked to get the money together We can live on that and with what your father will allow you"

"My father won't allow me a penny if I marry you"

Miss Lorry rose calmly "Very good If you're going to take that line, let us part I shan't see you again after to-night"

But Saltars was not going to let her go so easily He really loved this woman, while his liking for Eva was only a passing fancy begotten of her dead father's schemes Often, when away from Miss Lorry did he curse himself for a fool, and decide to break his chains, but when in her presence the magnetism of the woman asserted itself. Her bold, free, fiery spirit appealed to Saltars greatly also she was a splendid horsewoman and could talk wisely about the stables Saltars loved horses more than anything in life save this woman, and her conversation was always within his comprehension. Moreover, during all the time of their courting she had never allowed him to even kiss her, always asserting that she was a respectable woman. Consequently, as the fruit was dangling just out of Saltars' reach and only to be obtained by marriage, he was the more anxious to pluck it. Finally, Bell was really a magnificent-looking woman in a bold way, and this also appealed to the susceptible nature of Saltars

"Don't go, Bell," he said, catching her dress as she moved to the door Whereat she turned on him

"Leave me alone, Lord Saltars, and call me Miss Lorry I won't have you take liberties Either you love me and will marry me openly in a decent church, or we part I'm not going to have mud thrown on my good name for you or any one"

"You know that I love you——"

"I know nothing of the sort If you did, you'd not go after your cousin, not that I've a word to say against her, though she did treat me like dirt when we spoke at Wargrove"

"I only went to see my cousin about the money left by her father"

Miss Lorry turned and leaned against the wall near the door "There was no money left," she said sharply "Mrs Merry told Cain, and he told me The poor girl has to go out as a companion"

"I know But there is money Strode told me that he would give her and me forty thousand pounds if we married"

"Very well, then," said Miss Lorry, her eyes flashing, "why don't you go and marry her? I won't stop you"

"Because, in the first place, I love you, in the second, she has not got the money and don't know where it is, and in the third, she is engaged to a fellow called Hill"

"Allen Hill?" said Miss Lorry; "yes, I remember him He told me he was engaged when we spoke at the gate of the cottage. A nice young fellow and quite the man I love a man," said Miss Lorry admiringly, "and that chap has a man's eye in his head, I can tell you."

"What about me?"

"Oh, you're a man right enough, or I shouldn't have taken up with you. But I say, if Miss Strode's engaged to Hill why doesn't she marry him now that the father's dead and there's no obstacle?"

"I don't know why the marriage doesn't take place," said Saltars pondering, "but I think it is because there's no money"

"There's the forty thousand pounds."

"That can't be found, and there's no memorandum amongst the papers of Strode likely to say where it is I expect he brought the money home from Africa in the form of diamonds, and hid them somewhere"

Miss Lorry changed colour "Oh," she said thoughtfully, and then went on rapidly, "If this forty thousand pounds comes to Miss Strode, I suppose she'd marry Hill?"

"Rather She seems very fond of him"

"He's worth being fond of! he's a man I tell you, Saltars Humph! I wonder if the money can be found?"

"There doesn't seem to be much chance"

"Do you think the money is locked up in diamonds?"

"It might be As no money was found, Strode might have brought home his fortune in that form"

"I read the papers about the inquest," said Miss Lorry, staring at the ground, "what about that lawyer?"

"Mask? Oh, he knows nothing He said so at the inquest"

"I wonder if the wooden hand has anything to do with the matter?"

"Well," said Saltars, rising and yawning, "it was certainly stolen, so it would seem it had a value Of course if the hand was sent to Mask it was to be a sign that he had to give up any money he might have It might have been stolen for that purpose."

"Yes, and the man might have been murdered to obtain possession of it."

"I don't think so. If Strode had been murdered on that account, the hand would have been stolen when the body was lying in the Red Deeps"

"It was stolen when it lay in the cottage," said Miss Lorry, "I remember And Mask said that he had no money of Strode's, so there's not much use of the hand being sent to him It's all very queer"

"Do you intend to try and unravel the mystery of the death?"

"Why not? I'd like that girl married to Hill and out of my way. I don't intend to let her marry you So good-night," and Miss Lorry marched off without a word more.

CHAPTER XIV

SIGNOR ANTONIO

CAIN MERRY was a particular pet of Miss Lorry's, and the lad felt grateful to her for the attention He admired her exceedingly, and at one time had fancied himself in love with her But Miss Lorry, experienced in admirers, laughed at him the moment she descried the early symptoms, and told him she was old enough to be his mother It was creditable to Cain that he took the hint thus given, and devoted himself to Jane Wasp, with whom he had been in love ever since they attended the same board school. And after his passing fancy for Miss Lorry, the lad's love for the policeman's daughter became even more marked, much to the joy of Jane, who adored the dark-eyed scamp, and lost no opportunity of meeting him

But Cain was such a Bohemian, that this was no easy matter Owing to the nagging of his mother, he stayed away from Misery Castle as much as he could, and got jobs in the surrounding country and in London Also there was some influence at work on Cain's character, which Jane

could not understand, something that made him moody and inclined him to despair In her simple way Jane tried to learn what it was, that she might comfort him, but Cain always baffled her

On the morning after Miss Lorry's interview with Saltars, the lad was more dismal than usual, and was rather listless in his work As the circus was packing up to move on to Chelmsford, there was little time to be lost, and Cain came in for many a hard word At length the manager became exasperated at his indolence, and sent him off with a message to Miss Lorry, who had rooms near the Queen's Hotel Nothing loath to be relieved from moving heavy beams, and taking down the large tent, Cain set off in better spirits

On passing through the market-place about ten o'clock he saw Jane, perched on a light market-cart, and ran towards her with a bright face The girl received him with a joyful cry, and explained that she had been looking for him for the past hour

"Mrs Whiffles drove me over," she explained, getting down to speak more freely, "she keeps the Wargrove inn, you know——"

"Of course I know," said Cain quickly, "I'm Wargrove as well as you, Jane But how did your father let you go? I thought he was keeping you in to help your mother"

"Ah, he does that," said Jane with a sigh, "father's a hard one, Cain, and hates you like poison You see, he's all for the law, and you——"

"And I'm a vagabond, as my mother says Well, Jane, don't you fret, I'm getting a higher law than your father serves I'll tell you about it some day How did you come over?"

"I told you I came with Mrs. Whiffles. Mother wanted some things here, and as Mrs Whiffles was going, she thought I might come too. I shan't tell father anything, nor will mother . He's out till two, and we must be back before then. But mother wouldn't have let me come had she known the circus was here, Cain She says I'm not to think of you at all I'm to go out to service"

"We may marry before you do that," said Cain quickly, "how did you know the circus was here?"

"Mr Hill's groom Jacobs told me"

"Oh!" Cain frowned "You're too thick with that Harry Jacobs."

"I've known him all my life, Cain"

"So have I, and I don't like him He thinks he's every one, because he wears a smart livery I wear just as smart a one in the circus"

"Yes, but the circus ain't decent, Cain I could never marry you, if you kept on there I couldn't go about as you do, and if you're to be my husband I'd like to be near you"

"You shall be near me, and we'll marry to take service in something better than a circus," said Cain, his face lighting up

"What's that?"

Cain drew near and was about to speak, when his ear was suddenly seized by a large dark man, who frowned "Why aren't you seeing Miss Lorry, you young scamp?" said the stranger "I've got to do your business Mr Stag asked you particularly to give that note Hand it over"

"I'll take it now," said Cain, getting free, "leave my ear alone"

"You give the note to me, Cain Who is this?" and he looked at Jane

"She's a friend of mine from Wargrove," said Cain sulkily, "get back into the cart, Jane"

"From Wargrove?" said the dark man with a queer smile, "and her name?"

"I'm Jane Wasp, sir," said the girl, looking into the man's somewhat brutal face

The man laughed "Policeman Wasp's daughter, as I'm a sinner How's your fool of a father? Catching every one he shouldn't catch, I suppose? He was always too clever."

Cain interposed. "Leave her alone

——, I mean Signor Antonio," he said, "she's going home"

Signor Antonio turned on him with a snarl "Hold your tongue, you whelp," he said, "I'll talk to whom I like and as long as I like I want to know what Policeman Wasp's doing now?"

"He's looking after the murderer of Mr. Strode," said Jane politely

The man started and laughed "I hope he'll catch him but it's a business rather beyond his powers, I fancy Stop, you're the girl who delivered the package to Mr Hill?"

"To young Mr. Hill," said Jane, climbing into Mrs Whiffles' cart, "not to the father"

Signor Antonio turned on the boy with a frown "I told you it was to be given to Mr Hill himself"

"Well, he got it right enough," said Cain impatiently "I gave it to Jane at Colchester, and she took it to Mr. Allen, who gave it to his father."

"And what happened?"

"I don't know," said Jane "I didn't see Mr Hill get it"

"You fool," cried Antonio turning on Cain with another snarl "I wanted the girl to report how Hill looked when he opened the package, and now——"

"Jane's got nothing to do with this business," said Cain resolutely, "and I won't have her mixed up in your affairs"

"Do you know who I am?" demanded the man, black with anger

"Yes," replied the boy with a queer look, "you're Signor Antonio"

Jane thought she would interfere as there seemed to be a chance of a quarrel. "Mr. Hill went to London after he got the parcel."

"On the same day?" asked the man eagerly.

"Yes, sir Jacobs, who drives him, told me he went within two hours after he opened the parcel. He's gone up to attend a sale."

"Oh," sneered Signor Antonio, "do he's gone to attend a sale? Very good, that's all right. The parcel was a notice about a sale——"

"Of musical instruments, I know, sir Jacobs told me"

"You speak too much to Jacobs," cried Cain, "remember you're engaged to marry me, Jane."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Signor Antonio, who in spite of his Italian name and looks did not speak his own language, "you'll not marry the girl."

"But I shall," said Cain, setting his teeth, "mind your own business"

"This is my business, you brat——"

"Jane," said Cain pointing to the hotel, "yonder is Mrs Whiffles waving to you Drive over. I'll send you my address, and you can write to me Good-bye, dear."

He would have climbed on the cart and kissed her, but that the so-called Italian drew him back Jane, rather started and puzzled by the dominion this stranger seemed to exercise over Cain, drove hastily away to the curb where fat Mrs Whiffles stood waving her fat arms She looked back to see Cain and Antonio in fierce conversation, and dreaded a quarrel

And indeed there would have been a quarrel but for the boy's self-possession Cain appeared to have far more command of his temper than the older man, and spoke quietly enough "See here," he said, "I won't have you interfering with my affairs"

"Do you know who I am?" demanded Antonio again.

"You asked me that before and in public," said Cain, "and I told you, you were Signor Antonio. But you know well enough what you are and so do I"

"And what am I?" jeered Antonio.

"You're the man that deserted his wife and child, and your name is Giles Merry"

"Yes, it is; and don't you talk of deserting, you brat, I'm your father, so you look out. I'll thrash you"

"Oh no, you won't," said Cain boldly, "I'm quite equal to standing up to you, father. Leave my hand

ness alone I've put up with you ever since we met a year ago, and I did what you wanted because you promised me not to go near my mother I learn that you have written that you intend to call on her"

"What if I do? She's my wife as you're my son She's got a house over her head, and money, and I've got a right to share both"

"No, you haven't,' said Cain sharply, "you're no father of mine, as you deserted me and mother when we were poor Now that we've got money, you'd come and make mother miserable I kept my part of the bargain, so you keep to your If you write mother again or go near her, I'll make things hot"

Antonio made a dash at the boy—they were now in a quiet side street—"and gasped with rage "You unnatural young cuckoo '

"Leave me alone father, or I'll sing out for the police '

"What!" Antonio, finding force would not do, began to whine, 'you'd run in your poor old father?'

"I don't want to, said Cain, "but if you force me to, I must All I ask is for you to keep away from mother, and leave me alone If you don't, I'll tell Wasp something he may like to hear"

The older man turned pale through his swarthy skin "What will you tell him?' he asked in a thick voice

"Never you mind But I know you saw Mr Strode when he came to the circus that night after Lord Saltars Then there's Butsey— "

"What about Butsey?' asked the father uneasily, and glaring

"Nothing Only he's a bad lot I'm no great shakes n yself," admitted Cain sadly, "but I'm beginning to see how wicked I am If I was as bad as Butsey, father, I'd not treat you like this You sent Butsey with a lying message to mother— "

"I wanted to know how she looked"

"No, you didn't I believe you sent Butsey to steal that wooden hand'

"It's a lie I don't know who took it"

"I believe Butsey did, though why you wanted it I don't know And what is there between you and Mr Hill, father, seeing you sent him that cross?"

"That's my business,' growled Antonio, finding his son knew too much for him, "you hold your tongue"

"I will as long as you keep away from my mother"

"Lord, I'll keep away,' said Antonio good humoredly "I don't want to live with her nagging and whimpering, You're her son, sure enough—a young pig going against your lawful father'

"Only for my mother's sake And you want me to do wrong I'm seeing light father and I'm changing'

"What do you mean by seeing light? You're always saying that"

"I've been to the Salvation Army meetings' said Cain solemnly, "and I see what a sinner I am"

"Oh, you're going to turn parson, are you Well you can do what you like, but hold your tongue about my business

"I'll do so But tell me, father?' Cain looked anxiously into the brutal face, "had you anything to do with that murder?'

Antonio glared and looked like a devil He made another dash at the boy, but at that moment three or four men came round the corner, and amongst them a policeman At once Antonio burst out into a loud laugh and took to his broken English "Ver' goot, my leetle boy, gif me the letter I go to Mees Lorry Ah, Dio!'

Cain saw that he would not receive a reply to his terrible question just then, so, glad to get away on the chance of having another talk with Jane, he escaped Hardly had he turned the corner when his father was after him and a deep voice breathed in his ear.

"I had nothing to do with that," said Antonio anxiously; "I'm bad, but not so bad as that. I don't know who killed the man Go"—a push sent the boy reeling—"and hold your tongue I'll keep my part of the bargain and leave your mother alone Keep yours," and before Cain could recover his breath Antonio was ringing the bell of Miss Lorry's lodgings

That lady was just up and at breakfast Antonio was shown into her sitting-room, and found her drinking coffee She saluted him with a smile "Well, Giles, what's brought you here at this hour?"

"This letter from Stag," said Antonio, giving the note he had received from Cain, "and don't call me Giles, Bell"

"You seem very much afraid of people knowing you," she jeered, opening the envelope, and running her eyes over the letter 'Stag wants me to make another contract for the North' She threw down the note "Well then, I won't"

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Go to London and marry Lord Saltars"

"He means business, then?"

Miss Lorry rose, and looked as though she would slap Antonio's face "You hound," she hissed, "do you think I'd let any man play fast and loose with me Not a word" she added, seeing a grim smile on the strong man's face "I know what you would say Leave the past alone, or it will be the worse for you And see here, what's become of that boy Butsey?"

"He's in London at Father Don's"

"Poor little wretch Being made into a devil such as you are. Then, you send for him to come to Chelmsford I want him to deliver a letter, and the sooner it's delivered the better"

"Can't I deliver it?"

"No, you can't I can trust Butsey I can't trust you"

"Who is the letter to?"

"That's my business," flashed out Miss Lorry returning to her interrupted breakfast, "tell Stag I'll see him about the note at my own time"

"But, Bell, if you leave the show, how will you live?"

"I've got money saved You need not ask how much," she added, seeing the cupidity flash into the man's eyes, "for I am not going to tell you. I leave the show at the end of October, and then I remain in town till I become Lady Saltars"

"A nice bargain he'll get with you," growled Antonio "I know you"

"As we've been together in the circus for years, you ought to——"

"I wasn't thinking of the circus, but of——"

"Hold your tongue," she cried, rising again, "mind your own business"

"You don't make it worth my while Suppose I spoil your game with Lord Saltars?"

Miss Lorry's face became hard and her eyes glittered "You dare to interfere, and I'll send to that policeman at Wargrove to tell him I saw you at Westhaven speaking to a pair of the biggest blackguards in London"

"And what will that do? I've got a right to speak to whom I choose"

"You can for all I care," said Miss Lorry, sitting down once more, "your business has nothing to do with me so long as you leave me alone Why don't you go home to your poor wife?"

"My poor wife don't want me And I wouldn't live with her for gold untold, seeing how she nags and moans My wife?" sneered the man with an ugly look, "you're a nice one to talk of her"

"I tell you what, Giles Merry," said Miss Lorry, with great deliberation, "you'd better keep a civil tongue or you'll have a bad time I'll horsewhip you before the company, strong man as you are"

Antonio scowled "You wouldn't dare"

"Wouldn't I? You talk like that and you'll see You always were a brute and you always will be I only hope," added Miss Lorry, suddenly

looking into his eyes, "that you aren't something worse"

Antonio met the look with great composure "Meaning a murderer?" he said "Cain asked me if I did kill Strode"

"And how do I know you didn't?"

"Because I did not," cried the man, rising and looking fierce.

"Well," said Miss Lorry after a pause, "I dare say you didn't But you know who did" She looked at him searchingly

"I swear by all that's holy, I don't!"

Miss Lorry laughed disagreeably "Fancy Giles Merry talking of holy things Cain's worth a dozen of you"

"The young fool! He's going to join the Salvationists!"

"And a good job too, cried Miss Lorry, with a pleased look, "he may convert you"

"Let him try," said the affectionate father, "and I'll smash him"

"Perhaps you'd rather Cain joined Father Don, and Red Jerry and Foxy Oh, I saw you talking to Jerry and Foxy at Westhaven It's my belief," added Miss Lorry crushing her egg-shell, "that those two have something to do with Strode's end"

"Why don't you tell the police so?"

"Because I've got my own fish to fry," retorted Miss Lorry, rising and wiping her mouth, "but the presence of London thieves at Westhaven when a gentleman was murdered and robbed, looks queer If the police knew, they'd collar Jerry and Foxy and Father Don too I fancy you would be brought into the matter"

"Look here," cried Antonio with an oath, "do you charge me, or any of those three with murder?"

"No, I don't I only know that you were Strode's pal in the old days, and that you did a lot of dirty work for him. You're in with a bad lot, Giles, and will come to a bad end I only wish I could rescue that poor little brat of a Butsey from you, but the boy's past reforming I know nothing of him, save that he has an admiration for me, and ran my errands, so that is why I want him to deliver this letter You'll try and learn who the letter is written to, Giles, but you won't I can trust Butsey But why don't you turn honest man, and make money?"

"How can I? Honest men don't make money And I gain my living honestly enough as a strong man with Stag"

"Ah, that's a blind to cloak your real character You're in with Father Don's gang Why not split on them?" Miss Lorry leaned forward and spoke softly "For instance, why not call on Mr Strode's lawyer and tell him Red Jerry came home from Africa about the same time that Strode did?"

"What good would that do?"

"I can't say Mask knows something, and I want that something told, so that Miss Strode may marry Allen Hill and be put out of my way, for me to marry Saltars He admires her, and I want her safely married, beyond his reach If you told about Red Jerry, Mask might be able to get back Miss Strode's fortune"

"What!" Giles pricked up his ears "Fortune?"

"Forty thousand pounds, Giles, in diamonds, I fancy"

Antonio sat down "I never knew Strode was so rich," he said "Why, the hat told me at Brentwood that he'd made no money"

"I don't wonder at that," said Miss Lorry, "he knew you'd blackmail him if he confessed to having money"

"I knew enough to make things hot for him," said Giles, biting his large, square fingers, "but I never knew he was rich Lord, forty thousand pounds! If I'd known that——"

"You'd have killed him to get it"

"I don't say that," growled Giles, putting on his hat, "and as I didn't kill him, there's no more to be said. Where's the money now?"

Miss Lorry looked curiously at him. "You should know!"

"What the blazes do you mean?"

"Oh, if you don't know there's no more to be said. As Strode is dead,

you can't get the money now. Your blackmailing is of no value Miss Strode will get the diamonds and marry Mr Allen Hill"

"Hill?" said Giles thoughtfully, "does he take after that fool of a father of his?"

"No, he's a man and not a whimpering ass like Lawrence Hill"

Giles stood musing at the door "So Miss Strode will get the diamonds?" he said, "blest if I don't see her, and ——"

Miss Lorry whirled round "You leave her alone or I'll make things unpleasant for you The poor girl has sorrow enough, and she's a good girl"

"Keep your hair on, I'll do nothing at present" added Antonio significantly and with an ironical bow he departed

Miss Lorry clutched her breast with a frown "I'll write that letter and send it by Butsey," she said determinedly

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

Mr Mask had a dark little office in the city down a long narrow lane which led from Cheapside In the building he inhabited were many offices, mostly those of the legal profession, and Mr Mask's rooms were on the ground floor He had only two In the outer one a clerk almost as old as Mr Mask himself scribbled away in a slow manner, and showed in clients to the inner room This was a gloomy little dungeon with one barred window looking out on to a blank wall, damp and green with slime Light was thrown into the room through this window by means of a silvered glass, so the actual illumination of the apartment was very small indeed, even in summer In winter the gas glared and flared all the day.

Here Mr. Mask sat like a spider in his den, and the place was so full of cobwebs that it really suggested spiders in plenty There was a rusty grate in which a fire was never lighted, an old mahogany book-case filled with uninviting-looking volumes, and a tin wash-stand which was hidden behind a screen of shabby Indian workmanship The walls were piled to the dingy ceiling with black japanned deed boxes, with the names of various clients inscribed on them in white letters Before the window—and dirty enough the glass of that was—stood a large mahogany table covered untidily with papers, deeds, briefs, memoranda, and such like legal documents A small clearing in front was occupied by red blotting paper, and a large lead ink bottle with a tray of pens There was one chair for Mr Mask and one for a client Finally, as there was no carpet on the floor it may be guessed that the office was not an inviting-looking sanctum Into this hole—as it might fitly be termed—Allen was shown one morning He had not called immediately on Mr. Mask when he came to town, as he had been searching for his father for the last five days But all inquiries proved futile Allen went to the hotel at which Mr Hill usually stayed, but could not find him there He had not been stopping in the place for months Allen sought the aid of the police, but they could not find Mr. Hill Finally he put an advertisement in the paper, which remained unanswered Also Allen had called on Mr Hill's bankers, but found that he had not been near the place It was so strange that Allen was beginning to feel afraid The message conveyed in the symbol sent through Cain must be a very serious one, to make his father cut himself off from those who knew him, in this way

As a last resource, Allen came to see Mr. Mask, feeling he should have done this before. Mask had a large

business, but on the face of it appeared to do very little in the dingy office But he was a man who could be trusted with a secret, and many people who knew this intrusted him with affairs they wished kept quiet Consequently Mask's business was sometimes rather shady, but he made a great deal of money by it, and that was all he cared about

A silent cold man was Mask, and even in his own home at Bloomsbury he was secretive Still the man had his good point and had an undercurrent of good nature of which he was somewhat ashamed, heaven only knows why If he had been as kind as he looked, he certainly would not have asked Mrs Palmer to give poor Eva a home

"Well, Mr Allen, said Mask, who called him thus to distinguish him from his father whom he had known many years, 'so you have come at last?'

Allen, who was placing his hat on the floor, as there was no table to put it on, started and stared "Did you expect me?"

"Long ago,' said Mask putting his fingers together, and leaning back with crossed legs "in fact, you should have come to me five days ago There was no necessity for you to consult the police as to your father's whereabouts, or to call at his bank and hotel, or to put that very injudicious advertisement into the paper"

"You seem to know all about my doings?"

"Quite so I know a great many things To be frank Mr Allen, I have had you watched by a private detective, ever since you came to town"

Allen rose in a towering rage "How dare you do that, Mr Mask?"

"I did so at your father's request," said the lawyer, on whom the young man's rage produced not the least effect

"You have seen him?"

"I have He came to me when he arrived"

"Do you know where he is?"

"I do—but I am not at liberty to tell you"

"Do you know why he is acting in this way?"

Mr Mask's calm face suddenly wrinkled "No," he said, looking perplexed, "frankly, Mr Allen, I don't, and I am glad you have called I wish to talk the matter over with you"

"Why didn't you send for me, then?"

"Because it is never my wish to take the initiative. People come to me I don't go to them I get a lot of business by waiting, Mr Allen People are only too glad to find a man who can keep a secret, I have made a fine business out of nothing, simply by holding my tongue"

"And do you intend to do so in this instance?"

Mask shrugged his spare shoulders "That depends Johnstone!"

He raised his voice rather, and the door opened to admit a small clerk with a large red beard and a bald head, and a face like a with wrinkles What his age was no one could tell, and he said as little as he could being as secretive as his master Without a word he stood at the door, seen dimly in the half light of the office, for the day was dark "Johnstone," said Mr Mask, "I'll be engaged with this gentleman for some time Let no one in, till I call again"

Johnstone bowed and departed without a word, while Mr Mask went on in a smooth tone "I sit in this office from ten in the morning till six at night Johnstone comes at nine and leaves at four"

"Why before you?" asked Allen, wondering why this information was supplied

"Because I like the office to myself to see nervous clients The lawyers in the other offices of the building do not stay late, and frequently I am perfectly alone with clients who wish their business kept so secret that they don't want even to be seen entering this place"

"Are you not afraid?"

Mr Mask shrugged his shoulders again "No Why should I be?"

"Some rough client might do you some harm"

"Oh, I don't think so Any one who comes here finds it to his interest to conciliate me, not to threaten But I confess I was rather startled the other night'

"What do you mean?"

"I'll come to the story in time Because I intend to tell it, I drew your attention to my hours Well, Mr Allen," Mask leaned back again, "and what can I do for you?"

"Tell me where my father is'

'I can't do that I have not your father's permission to do so

'How long will he be away?"

"Until I can induce him to return," said Mask blandly

Allen leaned forward and looked the lawyer in the eyes 'Is my father afraid of being arrested?"

Mask started "No Why do you say that'

"Because--but before I tell you, may I ask his reason for staying away?"

Mask looked perplexed again 'I can't exactly tell you," he said "I may as well be frank, Mr Allen, as I don't like the situation Your father, whom I have known all his life, came to me over a week ago in great agitation He said that he was in danger, but what the danger was, he refused to confess I insisted on an explanation, and he promised to tell me some day Meantime he wanted to be hidden away for the time being I arranged that for him"

"I don't think that was wise of you, Mr Mask"

"My good Allen -I can call you so as I've known you since you were a lad- there is no reason why I should not help your father He may have done something against the law, for all I know, but as he is my client, it is my duty to help him He is a good client to me, and I am not such a fool as to lose him It is my business to keep secrets, and here is one I have not found out But I don't intend to let your father go away till I *do* find out," said Mask grimly "On that condition I helped him And after all,' added the lawyer, "your father is quite in his sane senses, and I have no right to dictate to him, even when he acts in so eccentric a manner"

"He is always eccentric," said the son wearily, "but this behaviour is beyond a joke How is my mother to live?"

"I can't send her money. Your father will see to that'

"But why am I shut out from my father's confidence?"

"I can't say Remember," said Mask in a slightly irritable tone, "I am shut out also"

Allen, much perplexed over the situation which was sufficiently annoying and mysterious, thought for a moment "Did my father tell you of the cardboard box he received?"

"He did not He said nothing, save that he wished to hide for a time, and would reveal his reason later"

"Then I must tell you everything I know," said Allen in desperation "If my father won't trust you I must My mother is in a great state of alarm, and for her sake I must get him to come back"

Mr Mask looked doubtful "I don't know whether he'll hear reason,' he said, after a pause "However, what you tell me will go no further"

"Well then, Mr Mask, I know why my father is afraid"

"It's more than I do Why is he afraid?"

"Because he thinks he may be arrested for the murder of Strode"

Mask pushed back his chair and rose quickly It was not an easy matter to astonish a man, who, in that very room, had heard tales worthy of the *Arabian Nights*, but Allen had certainly managed to do so "Do you mean to say he killed Strode?" he asked

"No But he thinks he did."

"How can that be?"

Allen related the episode of the pistol, and how he found that the bullet which killed Strode would not fit the barrel "So you see my father thought he had killed him, and when this cross was sent——"

"What cross?" asked Mask, looking up quickly

"I forgot I thought you knew" And Allen related everything in detail Mask heard the story with his chin on his hand, and in silence Even when in full possession of the facts he did not speak Allen grew impatient "What do you think?"

Mask moved a few papers hither and thither, but did not look straight at his visitor "It's a mystery," he said "I know not what to say But I am perfectly sure of one thing," he added with emphasis, "that your father never shot Strode——"

"I said so The bullet that went through the heart did not fit the barrel of my revolver"

"You misunderstand me I don't even believe that your father fired the shot which nipped the flesh of the arm Why, Strode was his best friend and he was devoted to him"

"My father to Strode, or Strode to my father?"

"Both ways you can take it Why, it was Strode brought about the marriage between your parents"

"My mother told me how the marriage came about," said Allen quickly, "but I understood that my father acted from a chivalrous motive"

Mask's lip curled "I fear not," he said, "there were circumstances connected with your mother——"

Allen shifted himself uneasily and grew red "I know—I know," he said sharply, "my mother told me about the necklace Surely you did not believe her guilty, Mr Mask?"

"No," said the lawyer emphatically, "I certainly did not. I can't say who stole the necklace, but it was lost and the thief has never been found. As to the marriage"—he waved his hand—"Strode brought it about—at least he told me so How he managed I can't say, unless it was that he used his influence over your father."

"My mother believes——"

"I know All the more credit to her But we can discuss this on some more fitting occasion Meantime we must talk of your father I don't see why you shouldn't see him," said Mask musingly

"Give me his address"

"Humph," said the lawyer, smiling slightly "I'll see But about this murder? Your father did not kill the man"

"No," said Allen sharply, "I swear he did not"

"Quite so Well, who did, and what was the motive?"

"Robbery was the motive," said Allen, taking a letter out of his pocket "Read this, I received it from Miss Strode"

Mask took the letter, but did not read it immediately "I don't believe the motive was robbery," he declared deliberately, "Strode had little money He certainly brought a hundred or so from Africa and I cashed his letters of credit"

"Did you give him the money in notes?"

"Yes and what is more I have the numbers of the notes I see what you mean you fancy the notes were stolen and that the criminal can thus be traced."

"Read the letter," said Allen impatiently

The lawyer did so, and thus became possessed of a faithful report of Saltan's communications to Eva which she had detailed for Allen's benefit On ending he placed the letter on the table "A blue pocket-book," said Mask musingly. "Yes, he had such a one I remember he placed the notes in it. I wonder I didn't ask about that at the inquest. It's stolen. Humph! Looks like a commonplace robbery after all Allen," he raised his eyes, "I gave Strode two hundred

in ten-pound Bank of England notes As I have the numbers, I may be able to trace how much of this sum has been spent by inquiring at the Bank. The numbers that are missing will be those that Strode had in the blue pocket-book when he went on that fatal journey to Westhaven If the murderer stole the book and has cashed the notes he may be traced by the numbers"

"I agree But what about the forty thousand pounds?"

Mask shook his head "I can't say Strode certainly never mentioned to me that he had such a sum"

"Did he say he had diamonds?"

"No Perhaps, as Miss Strode suggests the forty thousand pounds may have been locked up in diamonds as a portable way to carry such a sum But we found no diamonds amongst his effects, so it is probable he carried them on his person'

"And was murdered for the sake of them?"

"Perhaps It was strange, though, that Strode should have spoken to me about his wooden hand He promised that he would return from Wargrove to place a large sum of money in my hands—probably the forty thousand pounds, though he did not mention the amount"

"I dare say he intended to turn the diamonds into money and then give it to you"

"Perhaps," said Mask carelessly, "but we are not yet sure if the money was in diamonds However, Strode said, that when he wanted the promised money, he would get it from me personally, and, if he did not apply in person, he would send the wooden hand As he certainly would not have let the hand be taken from him while alive, it was a very safe token to send"

Allen looked down "It seems as though he was afraid of being killed,' he said musingly, "and he was killed, and the wooden hand was stolen"

"Not only that," said Mask, "but it was brought to me."

"What!" Allen started to his feet, "here! Why didn't you have the man who brought it arrested?"

"Because I could not," said Mask drily, "this is why I told you of my habits It was after four when Johnstone and every one in the place was away In fact, it was nearly six, and when I was getting ready to go, that this man came'

"What kind of a man was he?"

"A venerable old man, who looked like the Wandering Jew, with a long white beard, and a benevolent face. He asked if he could speak to me, and we talked I must remind you that every one in this building is away at the hour of six"

"I understand But what was the old man's name?"

"He gave none He simply asked if I had a sum of money in my possession belonging to Mr Strode I said I had not, so he asked if Mr Strode had left a packet of diamonds with me"

"Then there *are* diamonds!" cried Allen, "and you knew?"

"Now you mention it, I did know," said Mask coolly, "all in good time, Allen I wished to learn how much you knew before I spoke out I am a man who keeps secrets, mind you, and I don't say more than is needful Well, this old man, when I said that I had no diamonds, told me in so many words that I was a liar, and insisted that I should give them up To test him, I jokingly asked him if he had the wooden hand, which was to be the token to deliver the money or diamonds He then produced the article"

"Why didn't you arrest him?"

"Let me remind you that I was alone with the Wandering Jew, and that he brought two men of whom I caught a glimpse They remained in the outer room during our conversation I asked the old man how he became possessed of the wooden hand. He refused to tell me, but insisted that I should hand over the diamonds. I protested that I had none, and told

him what I tell you, as to what Strode said about giving me money later"

"What did the old man say then?"

"He began to believe me, and muttered something about the diamonds being in Strode's possession Then he sang out, 'No go, Jerry,' to a red-headed ruffian outside After that, he left'

"You should have followed, Mr Mask, and have had him arrested"

"I could scarcely do that," said the lawyer dryly, 'the old gentleman was too clever He went with one man, and left the red-headed Jerry to keep watch I had to remain in this room till seven, or else Jerry threatened to shoot me"

"He would never have dared'

"Oh yes, he would, and in this lonely building, no one could have stopped him Well I agreed, and remained in here doing some work At seven I opened the outer door Jerry had decamped, but where he and his friends went I can't say"

"Have you told the police?'

"No I think it is wiser to remain quiet These men will try again to get the money through the wooden hand, but they must first learn who killed Strode, and stole the diamonds --for I now agree with you, Allen, that the forty thousand pounds are locked up in diamonds But now we have talked on this point and it seems clear, let us talk on another in the presence of a third person"

"Who?" asked Allen anxiously

"Your father,' said Mask "Johnstone!"

The red bearded clerk entered, and when within, removed a false beard and a wig

"Father," cried Allen, rising It was indeed Mr Hill, pale and trembling

CHAPTER XVI

MR HILL'S STORY

ALLEN was so thunderstruck at the sight of his father, who had so unexpectedly appeared, that he could only stand silently staring Mr Hill gave a nervous titter, and tried to appear at his ease But the sight of his pale face and trembling limbs showed that the man was possessed by terror Also he locked the door while Allen gaped It was Mask who spoke first

'You are surprised to find your father as my clerk," he said smoothly to Allen, 'but when he came to me asking to be concealed, I arranged that Johnstone should take a much-needed holiday at the sea-side I believe he is at Brighton" said Mr Mask deliberately "In the meantime, your father, by means of a clever disguise adopted Johnstone's name, and personality, and looks In the dim light of the office everyone thinks he is Johnstone, and to tell you the truth, said Mr Mask, smiling, "my clients are so possessed by their own fears, that they take very little notice of my clerk'

Allen scarcely listened to the half of this explanation "Father," he cried, "whatever is the meaning of all this?"

Hill tittered again, and looked about for a seat as his limbs would hardly support him As Mr Mask had one chair, and Allen the other it looked as though Hill would have to sink on the floor But Allen pushed forward his own chair and made his father sit down Then, so white was the man, that he produced his flask, and gave him a nip of brandy "I never travel without this,' said Allen, alluding to the flask "It comes in handy at times,' and he spoke this irrelevantly so as to put Hill at his ease

The little man, under the grotesque mask of Johnstone, grew braver after the brandy, with Dutch courage. "You did not expect to find me here,

Allen?" he said, with his nervous titter.

"I certainly did not," said his son bitterly, "and I don't know why you need disguise yourself in this way. I know you did not murder Strode."

"But I intended to," cried Hill, suddenly snarling, and showing his teeth, "the black-hearted villain."

"I thought Strode was your friend, father?"

"He was my enemy—he was my evil genius—he was a tyrant who tried to crush all the spirit out of me. Oh," Hill beat his fist on the table in impotent rage, "I am glad he's dead. But I wish he'd died by torture—I wish he'd been burnt—sliced to atoms, I wish—'

"Stop,' said Mask, seeing Allen turn white and faint, at the sight of this degrading spectacle, "there's no need to speak like this, Lawrence. Tell us how you came to be at the Red Deeps."

"How do you know I was at the Red Deeps?" asked Hill, shivering, and with the sudden rage dying out of him.

"Well, you took your son's revolver, and—"

"You said you didn't believe I fired the shot, Mask,' cried the miserable creature. "I heard you say so. I had my ear to the keyhole all the time—'

"Father—father," said Allen, sick with disgust at the sight of his parent behaving in this way.

"And why not?" cried Hill, turning fiercely on him. "I am in danger. Haven't I the right to take all measures I can for my own safety? I *did* listen, I tell you, and I overheard all. Had you not proved to Mask here, that the bullet which caused the death could not have been fired out of your revolver, I'd not have come in. I should have run away. But you know I am innocent——"

"Quite so," said Mask, looking searchingly at the speaker, "therefore the reason for your disguise is at an end."

Hill passed his tongue over his dry lips and crouched again. "No, it isn't,' he said faintly, "there's something else."

"In heaven's name, what is it?" asked Allen.

"Leave me alone," snarled his father, shrinking back in his chair and looking apprehensively at his tall, white-faced son, "it's got nothing to do with you."

"It has everything to do with me," said his son with calm firmness, "for my mother's sake I intend to have an explanation."

"If my wife were here she would never let you treat me in this way, Allen," whimpered the miserable father. "Sarah"—he did not call his wife Saccharissa now, the situation being too serious—"Sarah is always kind to me."

Allen with folded arms leaned against the book-case and looked at his father with deep pity in his eyes. Hill was alternately whimpering and threatening; at one moment he would show a sort of despairing courage, and the next would wince like a child fearful of a blow. The young man never loved his father, who, taken up with himself and his whims, had done nothing to make the boy love him. He had never respected the man, and only out of regard for his mother had he refrained from taking strong measures to curb the pronounced eccentricities of Hill. But the man miserable cowed as he seemed, was still his father, and it behoved him to deal with him as gently as possible. In his own mind, Allen decided that his father's troubles—whatever they were—had driven him insane. But the sight of that cringing, crawling figure begot a mixture of pity and loathing—loathing that a human creature should fall so low, and pity that his own father should suddenly become a "thing" instead of a man.

"I want to be kind to you, father," he said after a pause, "who will you trust if not your own son?"

"You were never a son to me," muttered Hill

"Was that my fault?" asked Allen strongly "I would have been a son to you, if you had let me But you know, father, how you kept me at arm's length—you know how you ruled the house according to your whims and fancies, and scorned both my mother and myself Often you have spoken to her in such a manner that it was only the knowledge that you are my father which made me refrain from interfering My mother says she owes much to you——"

"So she does so she does"

"Then why take advantage of her gratitude? She gives everything to you, father, and you treat her in a way—faugh,' Allen swept the air with his arm, as though to banish the subject "Let us say no more on that point But I have come up here to get to the bottom of this affair, father, and I don't leave this place till I know all'

Hill tried to straighten himself "You forget I am your father," he said, with an attempt at dignity

"No, I do not forget Because you are my father I wish to help you out of this trouble, whatever it is I can save you from being accused of Strode's murder, but the other thing——"

"I never said there was anything else," said Hill quickly

"Yes, you did, Lawrence," said Mask "I have taken a note of it"

"Oh," whimpered Hill, "if you turn against me too——"

"Neither one of us intend to turn against you,' said Allen in deep disgust, for the man was more like a jelly-fish than ever, and constantly evaded all attempts to bring him to the point "For heaven's sake, father, summon up your manhood and let us know the worst!"

"I won't be spoken to in this way," stuttered Hill, growing red

Allen made one stride forward, and looked down from his tall height at the crouching figure in the chair—the figure in its shameful disguise, with the white face and wild eyes "You shall be spoken to in a perfectly quiet way," he said calmly, although inwardly agitated, "but you shall do what you are told I have put up with this state of things long enough In future, my mother shall govern the house, and you shall come back to it to indulge in whatever whims you like within reason But master you shall not be"

"Who will prevent me?" said Hill, trying to bluster

"I shall,' said Allen decisively, "you are not fit to manage your own affairs or to rule a house If you come back—as you shall—my mother, who loves you, will do all she can to make you happy I also, as your son, will give you all respect due to a father"

"You're doing so now, I think," sneered Hill, very white

"God help me, what else can I do?" cried Allen, restraining himself by a violent effort, "if you could see yourself you would know what it costs me to speak to you like this But, for your own sake, for my mother's sake, for my own, I must take the upper hand"

Hill leaped panting from his seat "You dare!——"

"Sit down," said his son imperiously, and pushed him back in his chair, "yes, I dare, father As you are not responsible, I shall deal with you as I think is for your good. I know how to deal with men," said Allen, looking very tall and very strong, 'and so I shall deal with you"

"You forget," panted Hill, with dry lips, "I have the money"

"I forget nothing I shall have a commission of lunacy taken out against you and the money matters shall be arranged——"

"Oh," Hill burst into tears, and turned to the quiet, observant Mask, "can you sit and hear all this?"

"I think your son is right, Lawrence."

"I shall go to law," cried Hill fiercely.

"Can a man in hiding go to law," hinted Mask significantly

The miserable man sank back in his seat and wept Sick at heart, Allen looked at the old lawyer "You are my father's friend, sir," he said gently, "try and bring him to reason As for me, I must walk for a time in the outer room to recover myself I can't bear the sight of those tears My father—oh, God help me, my father!" and Allen, unlocking the door, walked into the outer room sick at heart He was not a man given to melodrama, but the sight of his wretched father made him sick and faint He sat down in the clerk's chair to recover himself, and leaned his aching head on his hand

What passed between Mask and Hill he never knew, but after half-an-hour the old lawyer called Allen in Hill had dried his tears, and was still sitting hunched up in the chair But he was calmer, and took the words which Mask would have spoken out of the lawyer's mouth "I am much worried, Allen," said he softly, "so you must excuse my being somewhat unstrung If you think it wise, I'll go back."

"So far as I know I do think it wise"

"Let us hear the story first," said Mask

"What story?" asked Allen sharply

"My miserable story," said Hill, "I'll tell it all You may be able to help me And I need help," he ended piteously

"You shall have all help, father Tell me why you went to the Red Deeps and took my revolver."

Hill did not answer at once His eyelids drooped, and he looked cunningly and doubtfully at his son Apparently he did not trust him altogether, and was thinking as to what he would say, and what leave unsaid The two men did not speak, and after a pause, Hill, now more composed, began to speak slowly.

"I have known Strode all my life, and he always treated me badly As a boy I lived near his father's place at Wargrove, and my father liked me to associate with him, as he was of better birth than I We studied at the same school and the same college, and, when we went into the world, Strode's influence introduced me into aristocratic circles But my own talents aided me also," said Hill, with open vanity, "I can do everything and amuse any one When I stopped at Lord Ipsen's —"

"My mother told me of that," said Allen with a gesture of repugnance, "and I don't want to hear the story again"

"I'm not going to tell it," retorted his father tartly, "my idea was to explain a popularity you will never attain to, Allen However, I'll pass that over I married your mother, and Strode married Lady Eva Delham, with whom I also was in love—and I would have made her a much better husband than Strode," said the little man plaintively

"Go on, please," said Mask, glancing at his watch "There isn't much time I have to go out to luncheon."

"Always thinking of yourself, Mask," sneered Hill "you always did, you know Well, I saw little of Strode for some time Then I lent him money and saw less of him than ever Then he—"

"You told me all this before," interposed Allen, who began to think his father was merely playing with him

"I'll come to the point presently," said Hill with great dignity, "let me say, Allen, that although I hated Strode, and had good cause too—yes, very good cause—I liked Eva When you wished to marry her I was pleased She wrote to her father about the marriage He sent her a cablegram saying he was coming home —"

"And when he did arrive at Southampton he told her she was not to think of the marriage."

"He told me also," said Hill, "and long before He wrote from the Cape telling me he would not allow you to marry Eva"

"Allow me!" said Allen indignantly

"Yes, and told me I was to stop the marriage I wrote, and urged the advisability of the match When Strode reached Southampton, he wrote again saying he intended Eva to marry Lord Saltars ——"

"Did he make any mention of money?"

"No He simply said that if I did not stop the marriage he would disgrace me, here Hill changed colour, and looking furtively at both us listeners

"How disgrace you?" asked Mask sharply

"I shan't tell you that,' was the dogged reply 'all you need know is, that Strode could disgrace me I - I—made a mistake when I was a young man,' said Hill, casting down his eyes, so as not to meet the honest gaze of his son, "and Strode took advantage of it He made me sign a document confessing what I had done - —'

"And what in heaven's name had you done?" questioned Allen, much troubled

"That's my business I shan't say —it has nothing to do with you," said Hill hurriedly, "but Strode had the document and always carried it about with him I wanted to get it and destroy it so I asked him when he came to Wargrove to meet me at the Red Deeps, and then I would tell him how the marriage with you could be prevented I also said that I knew something about Lord Saltars——"

"What is that?"

"Nothing," said Hill, this time frankly. ' "I really knew nothing, but I wanted Strode to come to the Red Deeps He made an appointment to meet me there on Wednesday at nine"

"In that case, why did he wire to Eva he would be down on Thursday?"

"Because he wanted to come down quietly to see me And," added Hill hesitating, "he had to see some one else I don't know who, but he hinted that he had to see some one"

"When you spoke to him at the Red Deeps?"

"Yes I went there on Wednesday and he was waiting It was getting dark, but we saw plainly enough I urged him to give up the document He refused, and told me that he required more money I grew angry and left him"

"Alive?"

"Yes But I had your revolver with me, Allen I took it with the idea of shooting Strode, if he didn't give up the document ——"

"Oh,' cried Allen, shrinking back It seemed horrible to hear his father talk like this "But you didn't— --"

"No I got behind a bush and fired My shot touched his arm, for he clapped his hand to the wound Then he turned with a volley of abuse to run after me At that moment there came another shot from a clump of trees near me, and Strode fell face downward I was so afraid at the idea of any one having been near me, and of having overheard our conversation ——"

"And of seeing your attempt at murder,' interpolated Mask

"Yes—yes—that I dropped Allen's revolver and ran away"

"I found the revolver and took it home," said Allen, "so the way you acted the next morning when Wasp came was——"

"It was the morning after that," said his father dryly, "on Friday, and Strode was shot on Wednesday I never went near the Red Deeps again I didn't know if Strode was dead, but I knew that he had been shot I steeled myself to bear the worst, but did not make any inquiries out of policy When Wasp came that morning at breakfast, I knew what he had to say Strode was dead I dreaded lest Wasp should say that the revolver had been found, in which case you might have got into trouble, Allen.

but I was thankful nothing was said of it"

The young man was astounded at this cool speech but he passed it over, as it was useless to be angry with such a man "I picked up the revolver as I said," he replied, "but about the document?"

"I hadn't time to get it. The shot frightened me"

"Did you see who fired the shot?"

"No I was too afraid I simply ran away and never looked back"

At this point Mask held up his hand "I hear some one in the outer office," he said, and rose to open the door Hill slipped behind the table quivering with fear However, Mask returned to his seat "I am wrong," he said, "there's no one there Go on

"What else do you want to know?" questioned Hill irritably

"Why you fainted and left the house, when you got that cross from Giles Merry?"

Hill stared "You knew it was Giles?" he stammered "what do you know of Giles?"

"Nothing But Mrs Merry recognised the direction on the brown paper as being in her husband's writing. Why did you faint?"

Hill looked down and then looked up defiantly He was still standing behind the desk "I stole the wooden hand!"

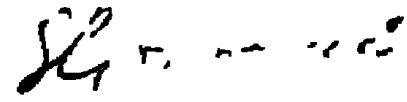
"What!" cried Mask and Allen, both rising

"Yes I had my reasons for doing so I took it from the body, when I was in the death-chamber I had it in my pocket when I saw you and Eva, and said it was stolen And then," went on Mr Hill very fast, so that Allen should not give expression to the horror which was on his face, "I took it home But I feared lest my wife should find it and then I would get into trouble Sarah was always looking into my private affairs," he whined, "so to stop that, I went and buried the hand on the common Some one must have watched me, for I put that cross to mark the spot When I opened the parcel and saw the cross I knew some one must have dug up the wooden hand and that my secret——"

"What has the wooden hand to do with your secret?"

Hill shuffled, but did not reply to the question "It was Giles's writing I knew he'd got the wooden hand, and my secret—Hark!" There was certainly the sound of retreating footsteps in the other room Allen flung open the door, while his father cowered behind the desk The outer door was closing Allen leaped for it but the person had turned the key in the lock They heard a laugh, and then retreating footsteps Mask, who had followed Allen, saw something white on the floor He picked it up It was a letter addressed to Sebastian Mask Opening this he returned to the inner office "Let us look at this first," said Mask, and recalled Allen, then he read what was in the envelope It consisted of one line "Open the wooden hand," said the mysterious epistle

"No," shrieked Hill, dropping on his knees, "my secret will be found out!"



CHAPTER XVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

ALLEN was stopping in quiet rooms near Woburn Square, which was cheaper than boarding at a hotel He was none too well off, as his father allowed him nothing Still, Allen had made sufficient money to live fairly comfortable, and had not spent much, since his arrival in England, owing to his residence at "The Arabian Nights"

It had been Allen's intention to escort his father back to Wargrove, whither Hill consented to go. But,

on explaining to Mask his desire to trace out Butsey by using the address of the Fresh Air People in Whitechapel, Mask had agreed to take the old man home himself He thought that it was just as well Allen should find the boy, who might know much

"He didn't steal the wooden hand," said Mask, when he parted from Allen, "but he is evidently in with the gang"

"What gang Mr Mask?"

"That headed by the old gentleman who called on me Jerry is one of the gang, and this boy Butsey another He sent that telegram, remember If you can find th lad you may learn much, and perhaps get back the hand'

"But what good will that do?" asked Allen, puzzled, "from what my father said when you read the anonymous letter, he evidently knew that the hand can be opened If, as he says, it contains his secret, he must have opened it himself when he took it home, and before he buried it'

Mask wrinkled his brows and shook his head "I confess that I cannot understand,' he remarked hopelessly, "nor will I, until your father is more frank with me This is one reason why I am taking him myself to Wargrove When I get him there I may induce him to tell me his secret"

"It must be a very serious secret to make him behave as he does"

Mask sighed "I repeat that I can't understand I have known your father all his life. We were boys together, and I also knew Stacde But although your father was always foolish, I can't think that he would do anything likely to bring him within reach of the law"

"He stole the wooden hand, at all events," said Allen grimly.

"Out of sheer terror, I believe, and that makes me think that his secret, for the preservation of which he robbed the dead, is more serious than we think. However I'll see what I can learn, and failing your father, I shall ask Giles Merry."

"Do you think he knows?"

"I fancy so The parcel with the cross was addressed in his writing, so it is he who has the hand He must have given it to the old scoundrel who called on me, so I think, Mr Allen, we are justified in adding Merry to the gang"

"But the hand must have been empty when my father buried it on the common, so how could Giles know his secret?"

"I can only say that I don't understand," said Mask, with a gesture of hopelessness, "wait till I get your father to speak out Then we may learn the truth"

"I dread to hear it, said the son gloomily

"Well," replied Mask in a comforting tone, "at all events we know it has nothing to do with this murder It is your task to learn who committed that, and you may do so through Butsey"

After this conversation Mr Mask took Hill back to Wargrove, whither the old man went willingly enough He seemed to think himself absolutely safe, when in the company of his legal adviser and old friend Allen returned to his rooms, and sent a message to Mr Horace Parkins that he would see him that afternoon It was necessary that he should keep faith with his friend Mark Parkins in South America, and find a capitalist and Allen thought that Horace, whom Mark reported shrewd, might know of some South African millionaire likely to float the mine in Bolivia As to the search after Butsey, Allen had not quite made up his mind He could learn of Butsey's whereabouts certainly, but if it was some low den where the lad lived, he did not want to go alone, and thought it might be necessary to enlist the service of a detective For his father's sake, Allen did not wish to do so. But he must have some one to go with him into the depths of London slums, that was certain Allen knew the life of the Naked Lands, and there

could more than hold his own, but he was ignorant of the more terrible life of the submerged tenth's dens

It was at three o'clock that Allen appointed the meeting with Parkins, and at that hour precisely a cab drove up In a few minutes Parkins was shown in by the landlady, and proved to be a giant of over six feet, lean, bright-eyed, and speaking with a decided American accent He was smartly dressed in a Bond Street kit, but looked rather out of place in a frock-coat and silk hat and patent leather boots

"Well, I'm glad to see you ' said the giant, shaking hands with a grip which made Allen wince—and he was no weakling ' Mark's been firing in letters about what a good sort you are, and I was just crazy to meet you It isn't easy finding a pal in this rotten planet of ours, Mr Hill, but I guess from what Mark says, you fill the bill, so far as he's concerned, and I hope you'll cotton on to me, for I'm dog-sick with lonelinness in this old city '

Allen laughed at this long speech and placed a chair for his visitor "You'd like a drink, I know," he said, ringing the bell

' Milk only," said Parkins, hitching up the knees of his trousers, and casting his mighty bulk into the deep chair "I don't hold with wine, or whisky, or tea, or coffee, or anything of that sort My nerves are my own, I guess, and all I've got to hang on to, for the making of bargains I'm not going to play Sally in-our Alley with them No, sir, I guess not Give me the cow's brew"

So a glass of milk was brought, and Mr Parkins was made happy "I suppose you don't smoke, then?" said Allen, amused

"You bet a pipe" He produced a short clay and filled it "I'm of the opinion of that old chap in *Westward Ho* ' if you know the book?"

"I haven't read it for years '

"Y' ought to I read it every year, same as I do my Bible Had I my way, sir," he emphasised with his pipe, "I'd give every English boy a copy of that glorious book to show him what a man should be"

"You're English, I believe, Mr. Parkins?"

"Born, but not bred so' Fact is, my mother and father didn't go well in double harness, so mother stopped at home with Mark, and I lighted out Westward-ho with father You'd never take me for Mark's brother?"

' I should think not You're a big man and he's small you talk with a Yankee accent, and he speaks pure English He's——"

"Different to me in every way That's a fact I'm a naturalised citizen of the U S A and Mark's a Britisher We've met only once, twice, and again, Mr Hill, but get on very well There's only two of us alive of the Parkins gang, so I guess we'd best be friendly, till we marry and rear the next generation I'm going to hitch up with an English girl, and Mark—if I can persuade him—will marry an American dollar heiress Yes, sir, we'll square accounts with the motherland that way"

All the time Parkins talked, he pulled at his pipe, and enveloped himself in a cloud of smoke But his keen blue eyes were constantly on Allen's face, and finally he stretched out a huge hand "I guess I've taken to you, some," said he, "catch on, and we'll be friends"

"Oh,' said Allen, grasping the hand, "I'm sure we shall I like Mark"

"Well then, just you like the American side of him, which is Horace Parkins I guess we'll drop the misters and get to business, Hill"

"I'm ready What do you want to see me about?"

"Well, Mark wrote to me as you'd got a mine of sorts, and wanted a capitalist I'm not a millionaire, but I can shell out a few dollars, if y' think you can get the property cheap"

"Oh, I think so The Spaniard that owns it wants money and isn't very sure of its value"

"Tell me about that right along"

Whereupon Hill detailed the story of the Indian, and how the mine had been worked by the Inca kings He described the locality and the chances of getting the silver to the coast also spoke of the labour required and the number of shares he and Mark intended to divide the mine into Horace listened, nodding gravely

"I see you've figured it out all right, Hill," said Parkins, "and I guess I'll take a hand in the game Give me a share and I'll engineer the buy g"

"Good" said Allen delighted, "we'll divide the mine into three equal shares You buy it, and Mark and I will work it"

"Good enough We won't want any one else to chip in It's a deal"

They shook hands on this, and then had a long talk about the West Indies, which Horace, who had never been there, knew chiefly through the glowing pages of *Westward Ho!* "Though I guess the place has changed since then," said he, "but the gold and silver is there right enough, and, maybe, if we looked long enough, we'd chance on that golden Manoa Kingsley talks about"

The talk drifted into more immediate topics, and Allen, much amused at his gigantic companion's naive ways of looking at things, asked him about his life Thereupon Horace launched out into a wild tale of doings in Africa He had been all through the war and had fought therein He had been up the Shire River, and all over the lion country He made money and lost it, so he said, and finally managed to find a fortune It was five o'clock before he ended, and later he made a remark which made Allen jump "So I just thought when I got Mark's letter telling me you were in the old country and about the mine, that I'd come home and see what kind of man you were. I'm satisfied—oh yes, you bet I'll trust you to the death, for I size up folk uncommon quick, and you?"

"I'll trust you also," said Allen, looking at the man's clear eyes and responding to his true-hearted grip, "and in fact I need a friend now, Mr Parkins"

"Call me Parkins, plain, without the Mister Well, here I am, ready to be your pal, while Mark's over the herring-pond What's up? Do you want me to cut a throat? Just say the word, and I'll do it Anything for a change, for I'm dead sick of this place ever since I left the *Dunoon Castle*"

It was this speech which made Allen jump "What, did you come home in the *Dunoon Castle*?"

"You bet I did, and a fine passage we had

"Did you know a passenger called Strode?"

Parkins raised his immense bulk slightly, and looked sharply at the questioner "Do you mean the man who was murdered?"

"Yes I suppose you read about the crime in the papers?"

"That's so Yes, I knew him very well Better than any one on board, I guess We got along finely Not a man I trusted, added Parkins musingly, "but a clever sort of chap Well?"

"Did he ever tell you of his daughter?"

"No He never spoke of his private relations"

"Well, he has a daughter, Miss Eva Strode You must have read her name in the papers when the case was reported"

"I did," said Parkins after a pause, "yes?"

"I'm engaged to her"

Parkins rose and looked astonished "That's a queer start."

"You'll hear of something queerer if you will answer my questions"

"What sort of questions?"

Allen debated within himself if he should trust Parkins all in all It seemed a rash thing to do, and yet

there was something about the man which showed that he would not break faith Horace was just the sort of companion Allen needed to search after Butsey in the slums of Whitechapel It was no good telling him anything, unless all were told, and yet Allen hesitated to bring in the name of his father Finally he resolved to say as little as he could about him, and merely detail the broad facts of the murder, and of the theft of the hand, without mentioning names "Parkins," he said frankly and with a keen look, "can I trust you?"

"I guess so,' said the big man serenely "I mean what I say You can take my word without oaths, I reckon"

"Very well, then," said Allen with a sudden impulse to make a clean breast of it, "sit down again and answer a few questions'

Horace dropped down heavily and loaded his pipe While he was lighting up he listened to Allen's questions But Allen did not begin before he had explained the purpose of his inquiries

"I am engaged to Miss Strode," said Allen, "but she refuses to marry me until I learn who killed her father"

'Very right and just" nodded Parkins.

"Well, I'm trying to hunt out the criminal, and I should like you to help me"

'I'm with you right along, Hill Fire away with your questions"

Allen began "Did Mr Strode ever tell you he had money?"

"Yes He made a lot in South Africa and not in the most respectable way I don't like talking ill of the dead, and of the father of the girl you're going to make Mrs Hill, but if I am to be truthful——"

"I want you to be, at all costs The issues are too great for anything false to be spoken"

"Well then, I heard a lot about Strode in Africa before we steamed together in the *Dunoon Castle* He made his money in shady ways"

"Humph!" said Allen, "I'm not surprised, from what I've heard."

'He was an I. D. B, if you want to get to facts"

"What's that?" demanded Allen.

"An illicit diamond buyer."

'Can you explain?"

'I guess so. Strode bought diamonds from any one who had them If a Kaffir stole a jewel, and many of them do steal, you bet, Strode would buy it from him at a small price He was on this lay for a long time, but was never caught And yet I don't know,' said Parkins half to himself, "that brute Jerry Train knew something of his doings!'

Allen almost leaped from his seat "Jerry! was he a big red headed man a ruffian?'

"He was a bad lot all through—a horse thief and I don't know what else in the way of crime He made South Africa too hot for him, and came home steerage in the *Dunoon Castle* I saw him at times, as I knew a heap about him and he thieved from a pal of mine up Bulawayo way He seemed to suspect Strode of yanking diamonds out of the country"

"Did Strode tell you he possessed diamonds?'

"No He said he'd made money to the extent of forty thousand pounds"

'Did he carry the money with him?'

Parkins shook his head "I can't say I should think he'd have letters of credit He'd a pocket-book he was always dipping into, and talked of his money a lot

"A blue pocket-book with a crest?"

"That's so Do you know it?"

'No But that pocket-book was stolen from the body At least it was not found, so it must have been stolen"

"Oh, and I guess Strode was murdered for the sake of the pocket book But see here," said Horace shrewdly, "I've told you a heap Now, you cut along and reel out a yarn to me"

The other man needed no second invitation. He laid aside his pipe and told the story of the crime, suppressing

only the doings of his father Horace listened and nodded at intervals

"I don't see clear after all," he said when Allen ended, "sure you've told me everything?"

The young man looked uneasy "I've told you what I could"

Parkins rose and stretched out his hand "What you've told me will never be repeated Good bye"

"What for?" asked Allen, also rising

"Because you won't trust me I can't straighten out this business, unless you do"

"The other thing I might tell isn't my own"

"No go If it concerns the murder it must be told I don't work half knowledge with any one You can trust me"

Allen hesitated He wanted to tell all, for he felt sure that Parkins would help him But then it seemed terrible to reveal his father's shame to a stranger What was he to do?

"See here, I'll tell—you everything, suppressing names"

"Won't do," said the inflexible Parkins, "good bye"

"Will you give me a few hours to think over the matter?"

"No It I'm not to be trusted now, I'm not to be trusted at all"

The young man bit his fingers He couldn't let Parkins go, for he knew about Strode and Red Jerry, and might aid the case a lot It was imperative that the truth should be discovered else it ought be that his father would be put to open shame Better, Allen thought to tell Parkins and get his aid, than risk the arrest of his father and see the whole story in the papers "I'll tell all," he said

"Good man," growled Parkins, his brow clearing

When in possession of all the facts, Parkins thought for a moment and delivered his opinion "Strode I take it was followed to the Red Deeps by Jerry Tran, and Jerry shot him and stole the pocket-book"

"But the wooden hand?"

"Merry's got it and he's in the gang Hold on," said Parkins, "I'll not give a straight opinion till I see this boy We'll go down and hunt him up He'll give the show away"

"But my father?" asked Allen, downcast

"He's a crank I don't believe he mixed up in the business at all"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FINDING OF BUTSEY

It did not take Allen long to learn something about Butsey An inquiry at the offices of the philanthropic people, who dealt with the transfer of ragged boys to the country for fresh air, brought out the fact that Butsey was a thief, and a sparrow of the gutter, who lived in a certain Whitechapel den address given—with a set of the greatest ruffians in London

"It was a mere accident the boy came here," said the spectacled gentleman who supplied the information, "we were sending out a number of ragged children to Westhaven for a couple of days, and this boy came and asked if he could go too At first, we were not inclined to accept him, as we knew nothing about him But the boy is so clever and amusing, that we consented he should go He went with the rest to Westhaven, but did not keep with those who looked after the poor creatures In fact, Mr Hill," said the gentleman frankly, "Butsey took French leave"

"Where did he go?"

"I can't tell you But one of our men caught sight of Father Don, and Red Jerry, at Westhaven—those are the ruffians Butsey lives with He might have gone with them"

"Did you take the children down on a Wednesday?"

"Yes And then they came back, late the next day"

Allen reflected that if Butsey sent the wire before four o'clock, he must have gone back to London, and wondered where he got the money for the fare Then he must have come down again, in order to give the lying message to Mrs Merry However, he told the philanthropist nothing of this, but thanked him for his information 'I intend to look this boy up" he said, when taking his leave

"Has he got into trouble?" asked the gentleman anxiously

"Well, not exactly But I want to learn something from him relative to a matter about which it is not necessary to be too precise I assure you, that Butsey will not come to harm"

"He has come to harm enough already poor lad I tell you, Mr Hill, that I should like to drag that boy out of the gutter, and make him a decent member of society He is sharp beyond his years but his talents are misused in the wrong way -'

"By Father Don, Red Jerry, and Co,' said Allen drily, "so I think"

"One moment, Mr Hill if you go to the Perry Street den, take a plain clothes policeman with you Father Don is dangerous'

"Oh, I'll see to that' said Allen, confident in his own muscles and in those of Parkins "You couldn't get Butsey to come here?"

"I fear not—I sadly fear not, Mr Hill The boy has never been near us since he came back with the children from Westhaven"

"He did come back with them then?"

"Oh yes," said the philanthropist frankly "by the late train, but what he did in the meantime, and where he went, I can't say He refused to give an account of himself'

"Shrewd little dev ," said Allen, "but I think I know"

"I trust it has nothing to do with the police,' said the gentleman anxiously, "a detective asked after Butsey I gave him the address of Father Don in Perry Street, but the lad could not be found The detective refused to say why the lad was wanted, and I hope he'll not come to harm If you find him, bring him to me, and I'll see what I can do to save him It's a terrible thing to think that an immortal soul and a clever lad should remain in the depths"

Allen assented politely, promised to do what he could towards bringing about the reformation of Butsey, and went his way He privately thought that to make Butsey a decent member of society would be next door to impossible, for the lad seemed to be quite a criminal, and education might only make him the more dangerous to the well being of the community However he reserved his opinion on this point, and got back to his Woburn room, to explain to Horace The big American for he virtually was a Yankee - nodded gravely

"We'll go down this very night," he said "I guess we'd best put on old togs, leave our valuables at home, and carry sixshooters"

"Do you think that last is necessary?" asked Allen anxiously

"It's just as well to be on the safe side, Hill If this boy is employed by Father Don and his gang, he won't be let go without a fight Maybe he knows too much for the safety of the gang'

"That's very probable," assented Hill drily, "However, we'll take all precautions, and go to Perry Street".

"This is what I call enjoyment,' said Horace, stretching his long limbs 'I'm not a quarrelsome man, but, by Gosh, I'm just spoiling for a fight"

"I think there's every chance we'll get what you want, Parkins'

So the matter was arranged, and after dinner the two men changed into shabby clothes It was raining heavily, and they put on overcoats, scarves, and wore slouch hats Both carried revolvers, and thus they felt ready for any emergency As Allen knew London comparatively well, he

took the lead, and conducted Horace to Aldgate Station by the underground railway. Here they picked up a cab and went to Whitechapel. The driver knew Petty Street but refused to go near it, on the plea that it was a dangerous locality. However, he deposited the two near the place, and drove away in the rain, leaving Allen and Horace in a somewhat dark street. A search for a guide produced a ragged boy of the Butsey type, who volunteered to show the way to Father Donsden. "You've got some swag to send up the spout, gents both," leered the brat, looking up to the big men as they stood under a lamp post.

"Just so," said Horace quickly, thinking this a good excuse, "you engineer us along, sonny, and we'll give you a shilling."

"'Ah both! that's good enough,' said the urchin, and scampered down a back street so quickly that they had some difficulty in keeping up with him. Later on, when they caught him at the end of a *cul-de-sac*, Allen gripped the guide by his wiry shoulder. "Do you know, they called Butsey?"

"Oh my eyes and ears, don't I just! Why, he's Father Don's spit. But he's in disgrace now."

"Why?" asked Horace coolly.

"Father Don sent him down the country, and he didn't turn up at the hour he was told to. He's been whacked and put on bread and water," said the brat, grinning, "worse luck for Father Don. Butsey'll put a knife to him for that."

"Good," whispered Allen to the American as they went on in the darkness. "Butsey will have a grudge against Father Don, and will be all the more ready to tell."

"Humph! I'm not so sure. There's honour among thieves."

They had no further time for conversation, for the guide turned down a narrow lane leading to the *cul-de-sac*, and knocked at the door of a ruined house with broken windows. A shrill voice inside asked who was there.

"Swell mobsmen with swag for the patrico," said the guide, whistling shrilly. "Show us a light."

The door opened, and a small pinched-looking girl appeared with a candle. She examined the two men and then admitted them. When they ventured within, she shut the door, which seemed to be very strong. But Horace noticed a door on the left of the passage leading into an empty room. He knew that one of the broken windows set in the street wall gave light to this room, and resolved to make it a line of retreat should they be too hardly pressed. Meantime the boy and girl led the way along the passage and towards a trap-door. Here, steps leading downward brought them to a large cellar filled with ragged people of both sexes. There was a fire in a large chimney, which seemed to have been constructed to roast an ox, and round this they sat, their damp garments steaming in the heat. A curtain partioned off a corner of the cellar, and when the strangers entered two shrill voices were heard talking together angrily. But the thieves around paid no attention.

"Red Jerry," said Horace touching Allen's arm, and he pointed to a truculent-looking ruffian almost as big as himself, who was lying on a bed composed of old newspapers and day-bills. He seemed to be drunk, for he breathed heavily and his pipe had fallen from his lovered lips. "Nice man to tackle," muttered Horace.

"Come along," said the guide, tugging at Allen's hand. "Father Don's got some one in there, but he'll see you. What's the swag—silver?"

"Never you mind," said Horace, "you find Butsey and I'll make it worth your while."

"Give us a sov and I'll do it," said the brat. "I'm Billy, and fly at that."

"Good. A sov you shall have."

The boy whistled again and some of the thieves cursed him. He then pushed Horace towards the ragged curtain behind which the shrill voices sounded, and vanished. The two

were now fully committed to the adventure

Curiously enough, the ruffians in the cellar did not take much notice of the strangers Perhaps they were afraid of Father Don, seeing that the two came to dispose of swag, and at all events they apparently thought that Father Don could protect himself Meanwhile the keen ears of Horace heard a deeper voice, something like a man's, mingling with the shrill ones of the other speakers Without a moment's hesitation, and anxious to get the business over, the big American dragged aside the curtain and entered

Allen and he found themselves before a narrow door On entering this, for it was open, they saw an old man with a white beard sitting at a small table with papers before him Near, was a small sharp faced man, and at the end of the table sat a woman dressed in black

"It won't do, Father Don," the woman was saying in deep tones, "you told that brat to rob me Give it up, I tell you"

"Give up what?" asked Father Don sharply "How can I give up anything, when I don't know what it is?"

"Butsey knows," said the woman "Where's he?"

"On bread and water in the attic," said the small man with a shrill laugh, "he's having his pride brought down"

"You'd better take care of Butsey," said the woman dryly, "or he'll sell you"

"Let him try," snarled the benevolent-looking old gentleman "Red Jerry's his father and will break his back

This much the two gentlemen heard, and it was then that the American appeared in the narrow doorway The woman started and looked at him He eyed her in turn and saw a fine-looking creature with dark eyes, and of a full voluptuous beauty hardly concealed by the plain dark robes she wore Allen glanced over Parkins's shoulder and uttered an ejaculation "Why, Miss Lorry," he said.

The woman started and rose quickly, overturning the table The small lamp on it, fell and went out There were a few curses from Father Don and a shrill expostulation from the small man In the hot darkness a dress brushed past the two men who were now in the room, and a strong perfume saluted their nostrils Horace could have stopped Miss Lorry from going, but he had no reason to do so, and she slipped out while Father Don was groping for the lamp, and the other man struck a match As the blue flare spurted up, the man saw the two who had entered "What's this?" he cried with an oath, which it is not necessary to set down, "who are you?"

"We've come about business," said Horace, "don't you move till the old man's got the lamp alight, or you'll get hurt"

"It's the 'tecs,' said Father Don savagely

"I guess not We've come to do business"

This remark seemed to stimulate the curiosity of the two men, and they refrained from a shout which would have brought in all the riff raff without Allen congratulated himself, that Parkins had roused this curiosity He had no desire to fight in a dark cellar with his back to the wall against a score of ruffians In a few minutes the lamp was lighted "Turn it up, Foxy," said Father Don, "and now, gentlemen," he added politely, "how did you get here?"

"A boy called Billy brought us," said Allen stepping forward "I fear we've frightened the lady away"

"Let her go, the jade," said Foxy shrilly, "there would have been a heap of trouble if she'd remained," and he confirmed this speech with several oaths

Father Don did not swear He spoke in a clear, refined, and educated voice, and apparently was a well-educated man who had fallen into

the depths through some rascality But his face looked most benevolent, and no one would have suspected him of being a ruffian of the worst He eyed Allen piercingly, and also his companion "Well, gentlemen," he asked quietly, "and what can I do for you?"

Horace sat down heavily and pulled out his pipe "We may as well talk comfortably," he said "Sit down, Hill

"Hill?" said Father Don with a start, while Foxy opened his small eyes—"not of Wargrove?"

"The same," said Allen coolly "How do you know me?"

"I know a good many things" said Father Don calmly

"Do you know who shot Strode?"

Foxy rose as though moved by a spring "You recognize that lady, are you?" said he shrilly, "then you've come to the wrong shop"

"Oh, I guess not," said Horace lazily "to the right shop You see, Mister," he went on to the elder ruffian, "we want that wooden hand

"What wooden hand?" asked Father Don "If you mean—"

"Yes, I do mean that," said Allen quickly, "you brought it to Mr Mask to get the money"

"Did I?" said Father Don coolly, and eyeing the young man "well, maybe I did But I didn't take it from the dead?"

Allen colored "Merry took it," he said

"Oh no, he didn't," sneered Foxy "Merry got it from Butsey, who dug it up after it had been planted by—"

"Stop" said Allen, rising "Father Don," he added, turning to the old man, "you seem to be a gentleman—"

"I was once But what's that got to do with this?"

"Stop this man," he pointed to Foxy, "from mentioning names"

"I'll stop everything, if you'll tell us where the diamonds are to be found," said Father Don

"I don't know what you mean," said Allen

"Oh yes, you do. You know everything about this case, and you've come here to get the hand Well then, you won't Only while I hold that hand can I get the diamonds"

"Where will you get them?"

"That's what I want you to tell me"

"I guess Red Jerry knows," said Horace sharply, "he took the diamonds from the dead body of the man he shot"

"Meaning Strode," said Foxy, with a glance at Father Don

"Jerry didn't shoot him," said the venerable fraud

"I surmise he did," said Parkins "Ask him"

"How do you know about Jerry?" asked Father Don unmovably

"I sailed along o him, and saved him from being lynched as a horse-thief If you won't call him in I'll do so myself

"Hold your tongue," said Father Don, rising and looking very benevolent, "you take too much upon yourself I am king here, and if I say the word neither of you will go out alive"

"Oh I guess so," said Horace coolly, "we don't come unprepared," and in a moment he swung out his Derringer "Sit still, Father Christmas," said Parkins, levelling this, "or you'll get hurt"

Seeing Parkins's action, Allen produced his weapon and covered Foxy, so there sat the kings of the castle, within hail of their ruffianly crew, unable to call for assistance

"And now we'll call in Jerry," said Allen coolly "Sing out, Parkins"

But before the big American could raise a shout there was a sudden noise outside A shrill voice was heard crying that the police were coming, and then ensued a babel. Father Don seized the opportunity when Parkins's eye was wavering to knock the revolver out of his hand The American thereupon made a

clutch at his throat, while Allen tripped Foxy up A small boy dashed into the room He was white-faced, stunted, red-haired, and had but one eye At once he made for Parkins, squealing for the police When he got a grip of Horace's hand he dropped his voice

"Ketch t'other cove's hand, and mine," said the boy, and then with a dexterous movement overturned the table, whereby the lamp went out again for the second time Parkins seized the situation at once, and while Father Don, suddenly released, scrambled on the floor, and made use for the first time of bad language, he grabbed Allen's hand and dragged him toward the door Horace in his turn was being drawn swiftly along by the small boy The outer cellar was filled with a mass of screaming, squalling, swearing humanity, all on the alert for the advent of the police The boy drew the two men through the crowd, which did not know whence to expect the danger Horace hurled his way through the mob by main strength, and Allen followed in his devastating wake shortly, they reached the trap door, and ran along the passage The boy pulled them into the side room Horace had noted when he came to the den

"Break the winder," said the boy to Parkins

The American did not need further instructions, and wrapping his coat round his arm he smashed the frail glass From below came confusedly the noise of the startled thieves But Horace first, Allen next, and the boy last, dropped on to the pavement Then another lad appeared, and all four darted up the street In ten minutes they found themselves blown but safe, in the chief thoroughfare and not far from a policeman, who looked suspiciously at them

"There," said the last-joined boy, "you're safe Butsey saved y'"

"Butsey?" said Allen, looking at the stunted, one-eyed lad

"That's me," said Butsey with a grin, "y'were near being scragged by th'ole man If y'd called Red Jerry, he'd ha' done fur y' Miss Lorry told me t' get you out, and I've done it"

"But I reckon the old Father Christmas told us you were locked up"

"Was," said Butsey laconically, "in th' attic—bread an' water I ain't goin' to work fur such a lot any more, so I dropped out of th' winder, and climbed the roof—down the spout In the street I met Miss Lorry—she told me there was fightin' below, so" he winked.

"Then there was no police?" said Allen, admiring the boy's cleverness

"Not much But they're allays expecting of th' peelers," said Butsey coolly, "twasn't difficult to get 'em mazzed with fright But you look here, Misters, you clear out now, or they'll be after you"

"You come also, Butsey"

"Not me I'm agoin to doss along o' Billy here I'll come an' see you at Wargrove and bring the wooden hand with me"

"What," said Allen, "do you know—"

"I knows a lot, an' I'm goin' to split," said Butsey "Give us a bob," and when Allen tossed him one, he spat on it for luck "See y' m' own time," said Butsey "I'm goin' to turn respectable an' split Th' ole man ain't goin' to shut me up for my 'Night,' and catching his companion's arm, both boys ran off into the darkness

CHAPTER XIX

MRS MERRY'S VISITORS

THE visit to the den was certainly a fiasco. Those who had ventured into those depths, had, on the face of it, gained nothing. What would have

happened had not Butsey raised the false alarm it is impossible to say. According to the boy, Jerry would have turned disagreeable, and probably there would have been a free fight. As it was, Allen and Horace came back without having achieved their object. They were as far as ever from the discovery of the truth.

"And yet, I don't know," said Allen hopefully, "somehow I feel inclined to trust Butsey. He's got some scheme in his head."

"Bah!" said Horace heavily, "you can't trust a boy like that. He's got his monkey up because the old man dropped on him, but like as not he'll change his tune and go back. Father Don'tuli make things smart. He can't afford to lose a promising young pup like Butsey."

"I believe the boy will come to Wargrove as he said," insisted Allen.

"In that case I guess we'd better go down too. Would you mind putting me up for a few days?"

"I'll be glad, and I don't think my father will object. It is just as well you should see him."

"That's why I want to come down," said Parkins cheerfully. "You see, Hill, the business has to be worked out somehow. I think your father's got a crazy fit, and there isn't anything he's got to be afraid of. But he's shivering about some one, and who that some one is we must learn. Better we should sift the matter ourselves than let the police handle it."

Allen turned pale. "God forbid," said he, "I want the authorities kept away."

So Allen wrote a letter to his father, asking if he could bring down Parkins for a few days. The reply, strange to say, came from Mrs. Hill, and the reading of it afforded Allen some thought.

"There is no need to ask your father anything," she wrote, "he has given everything into my hands, even to the money. What the reason is I can't say, as he refuses to speak. He seems very much afraid, and remains in his own rooms—the Japanese apartments. Mr. Mask also refused to speak, saying my husband would tell me himself if he felt inclined, but I can learn nothing. I am glad you are coming back, Allen, as I am seriously anxious. Of course you can bring Mr. Parkins. The house is large and he will not need to go near your father, though, it may be, the sight of a new face would do your father good. At all events come down and let us talk over things."

So Allen and Horace went to Westhaven and drove over to Wargrove. On the way Allen stopped the brougham, which was driven by Harry Jacobs, and took Horace to the Red Deeps to see the spot where the murder had been committed. When they got back—as the day was wet—their boots were covered with the red mud of the place. Jacobs saw this, and begged to speak to Allen before he got in.

"I say, Mr. Allen," he whispered, so that Parkins, now in the brougham, should not hear, "do you remember when I drove you to Misery Castle I said I'd tell you something?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Well, you know I clean the boots, sir? Well, master's boots were covered with that red mud, on the day after—"

"I know all about that," interrupted Allen, feeling his blood run cold as he thought what trouble might come through the boy's chatter, "my father explained. You need not mention it."

"No, sir," said Jacobs obediently enough. He was devoted to Allen, for a queer reason that Allen had once thrashed him for being impertinent. There was no danger that he would say anything, but on the way to Wargrove the groom wondered if his master had anything to do with the commission of the crime. Only in the direction of the Red Deeps could such mud be found, and Jacobs had no doubt but that Mr. Hill senior had been to the place.

When they arrived at "The Arabian

Nights" Mr Hill at first refused to see Allen, but consented to do so later When the young man entered the Japanese rooms, he was alarmed to see how ill his father looked The man was wasting to skin and bone, his face was as white as death, and he started nervously at every noise

"You must see Dr Grace," said Allen

"No," said Hill, "I won't—I can't—I can't How can you ask me to see any one when I'm in such danger?"

"You're in no danger here," said his son soothingly

"So your mother says, and I can trust her Let me keep to my own rooms, Allen and leave me alone"

"You don't mind Parkins being in the house?"

"Why should I?—the house has nothing to do with me I have given everything over to your mother's care Mask has drawn up my will—it is signed and sealed, and he has it Everything has been left to your mother I left nothing to you," he added maliciously

"I don't want anything, so long as my mother is safe"

"She is safe," said his father gloomily, "but am I? They'll find me out and kill me——"

"Who will?" asked Allen sharply

"Don't speak like that" your voice goes through my head Go away and amuse your friend Your mother is mistress here—I am nothing, I only want my bite and sup—leave me alone—oh, how weary I am!"

So the miserable man maundered on He had quite lost his affectations, and looked worn out He mostly lay on the sofa all day, and for the rest of the time he paced the room ceaselessly Seeing him in this state Allen sought his mother

"Something must be done," he said

"What can be done?" said Mrs Hill, who looked firmer than ever "He seems to be afraid of something What it is I don't know—the illness is mental, and you can't minister to a mind diseased Perhaps you can tell me what this all means, Allen"

"I'll tell you what I know," said Allen wearily, for the anxiety was wearing out his nerves, and he thereupon related all that had taken place since he left Wargrove Mrs Hill listened in silence

"Of course, unless your father speaks we can do nothing," she said at last, "do you think he is in his right mind, Allen?"

"No He has always been eccentric" said the son, "and now, as he is growing old he is becoming irresponsible I am glad he has given everything over to you mother, and has made his will"

"Mr Mask induced him to do that," said Mrs Hill thankfully "if he had remained obstinately fixed about the money I don't know what I should have done But now that everything is in my hands I can manage him better Let him stay in his rooms and amuse himself, Allen If it is necessary that he should see the doctor I shall insist on his doing so But at present I think it is best to leave him alone

"Well, mother, perhaps you are right And in any case Parkins and I will not trouble him or you much I'll introduce him to Mrs Palmer, and she'll take him off our hands"

"Of course she will," said Mrs Hill, rather scornfully, "the woman's a born flirt So you don't know yet who killed Eva's father, Allen?"

"No," said he, shaking his head "I must see Eva and tell her of my bad fortune"

No more was said at the time, and life went on fairly well in the house Under Mrs Hill's firm sway the management of domestic affairs was much improved, and the servants were satisfied, which they had never been when Lawrence Hill was sole master Parkins was much liked by Mrs Hill, and easily understood that Mr Hill, being an invalid, could not see him. She put it this way to save

her husband's credit She was always attending to him, and he clung to her like a frightened child to its mother There was no doubt that the fright over the parcel had weakened a mind never very strong

Allen and Parkins walked, rode, golfed on the Shanton Links, and paid frequent visits to Mrs Palmer's place Allen took the American there within a couple of days of his return, and the widow forthwith admired Parkins 'A charming giant,' she described him and Horace reciprocated

"I like her no end, he confided to Allen, "she's a chipper Just the wife for me'

Eva laughed when Allen told her this, and remarked that a thing went on as they were doing there was every chance that Mrs Palmer would lose her heart

'But that's ridiculous, Eva' said Allen "they have known each other only five days

"Well, we fell in love in five minutes' said Eva smiling, which provocative remark led to a change of kisses

The two were seated in the drawing room of the villa They had enjoyed a very good dinner and had now split into couples Allen and Eva were in the drawing room near the fire, while Parkins and Mrs Palmer played billiards It was a chill raw evening, but the room looked bright and cheerful The lovers were very happy being together again and especially at having an hour to themselves Mrs Palmer was rather exacting, and rarely let Eva out of her sight

"But she is really kind, said Eva, turning her calm face to Allen "no one could be kinder'

"Except me, I hope," said Allen, crossing the hearth rug and seating himself by her side "I want to speak seriously Eva'

"Oh dear, she said in dismay, "is it about our marriage?"

"Yes I have arranged the money business with Horace Parkins, and it is necessary I should go to South America as soon as possible If I don't, the mine may be sold to some one else"

'But can't Mr Mark Parkins buy it?"

'Well, he could, but Horace wants to go out, so as to be on the spot, and I must go with him It's my one chance of making a fortune, for the mine is sure to turn out a great success As I want to marry you, Eva, I must make money There is no chance, so far as I can see, of your getting that forty thousand pounds Lord Saltash spoke of'

"Then you really think, Allen, that there is money"

"I am certain of it—in the form of diamonds But we'll talk of that later Meantime I want to say that, as you wish it we'll put off our marriage for a year You can stay here with Mrs Palmer, and I'll go next month to South America with Horace Parkins"

"But what about my father's death?"

'I hope that we'll learn the truth within the next three weeks, said Allen "Everything turns on this boy, Batsey He knows the truth'

"But will he tell it?"

"I think he will The lad is clever but venomous The way in which he has been treated by his father and Don has made him bitter against them Also, after the false alarm he gave the other night to get Parkins and me out of the mess, he can't very well go back to that place The old man would murder him, and I don't fancy the poor little wretch would receive much sympathy from his father'

"What do you think of him, Allen?"

'My dear I don't know enough about him to speak freely From what the philanthropist in Whitechapel says I think the boy is very clever, and that his talents might be made use of He is abominably treated by the brutes he lives with—why, his eye was put out by his father

But the boy has turned on the gang He burnt his boats when he raised that alarm, and I am quite sure in his own time, he will come down here and turn King's evidence"

"About what?"

"About the murder The boy knows the truth It's my opinion that Red Jerry killed your father, Eva"

"How do you make that out?" she asked anxiously

"Well, Red Jerry knew of your father in Africa and knew that he was laying diamonds Allen suppressed the fact of Strode's being an I D B "He followed him home in the *Dunoon Castle*, and then went to tell Fo y and Father Don at Whitechapel They came down to Westhaven and tracked your father to the Red Deeps, and there shot him I can't understand why they did not take the wooden hand then, though"

"Who did take the hand?" asked Eva

"My father Yes," said Allen sadly, "you may look astonished and horrified, Eva, but it was my unhappy father He is not in his right mind, Eva for that is the only way to account for his strange behaviour,' and then Allen rapidly told Eva details

"Oh,' said the girl when he finished, "he must be mad, Allen I don't see why he should act in that way if he was not Your father has always been an excitable, eccentric man, and this trouble of my father's death has been too much for him I quite believe he intended to kill my father, and thank God he did not -that would have parted us for ever But the excitement has driven your father mad, so he is not so much to blame as you think."

"I am glad to hear you say so, darling," said the poor young fellow, "for it's been like a nightmare, to think that my father should behave in such a manner I dreaded telling you, but I thought it was best to do so"

"I am very glad you did," she replied, putting her arms around him, "oh, don't worry, Allen Leave my father's murder alone Go out to Bolivia, buy this mine, and when you have made your fortune come back for me I'll be waiting for you here, faithful and true"

"But you want to know who killed Mr Strode?'

"I've changed my mind," she answered quickly, "the affair seems to be so mysterious that I think it will never be solved Still I fancy you are right Red Jerry killed my father for the sake of the diamonds"

"He did not get them if he did," said Allen, "else he and Father Don would not have gone to see Mask and thus have risked arrest No, my dear Eva, the whole secret is known to Butsey He can tell the truth If he keeps his promise and comes here we shall know all if he does not, we'll let the matter alone I'll go to Bolivia about this business, and return to marry you'

"And then we'll bury the bad old past,' said Eva, "and begin a new life, darling But, Allen, do you think Miss Lorry knows anything?'

"What, that cacus woman? I can't say It was certainly queer she should have been in that den What a woman for your cousin to marry"

"I don't know if he will marry after all,' said Eva "I believe old Lady Ipsen will stop the marriage'

"How do you know?"

"Because she wrote to say she was coming to see me She says she will come unexpectedly, as she has something to tell me"

Allen coloured He hoped to avoid old Lady Ipsen as he did not forget that she had accused his mother of stealing the Delham heirloom However, he merely nodded and Eva went on "Of course I am willing to be civil to her and shall see her But she's a horrid old woman, Allen, and has behaved very badly to me I am her granddaughter, and she should have looked after me I won't let her do so now Well, Allen, that's one

piece of news I had to tell you. The next is about Giles Merry.'

"'What about him?'

"'I received a letter from Shanton written by Miss Lorry. That was when you were away. She sent it over by Butsey.'

"'What! Was that boy here?'

"'Yes. When you were away. He delivered it at the door and went. I only knew it was Butsey from the description, and by that time the boy was gone. Had I seen him I should have asked Wisp to keep him here till you came back.'

"I understand," said Allen thoughtfully. "Miss Lorry sent for Butsey. He was told to return to Lorry's at Whitechapel, within a certain time and did not. For that, Father Don shut him up in the attic and fed him on bread and water. The treatment made Butsey rebellious. But what had Miss Lorry to say?"

"She wrote that if Giles Merry worried me I was to let her know and she'd stop him doing so."

Allen looked astonished. "Why should Giles worry you?" he asked indignantly.

"I can't say. He hasn't come to see me yet, and if he does, of course I would rather you dealt with him than Miss Lorry. I want to have nothing to do with her."

"Still, she's not a bad sort," said Allen after a pause, "she saved our lives on that night by sending Butsey to get us out of the den. Humph! If she met Butsey on that night I wonder if she asked him to return what he'd stolen?"

"What was that?" asked Eva.

"I don't know. Horace Parkins and I overheard her complaining that Butsey, when down seeing her, had stolen something. She refused to say what it was and then bolted when she saw me. But what has Giles Merry to do with her?"

"Cain told me that Giles was the 'strong man' of Stag's Circus.

"Oh, and Miss Lorry knows him as a fellow artiste. Humph! I dare say he is aware of something queer about him. From the sending of that parcel, I believe Giles is mixed up with Father Don's lot, and, by Jove, Eva, I think Miss Lorry must have something to do with them also! We've got to do with a nice lot, I must say. And they're all after the diamonds. I houldn't wonder if Butsey had them, after all. He's just the kind of young scamp who would get the better of the older ruffians. Perhaps he has the diamonds safely hidden and is leaving the gang, so as to turn respectable. He said he wanted to cut his old life. 'Yes,' Allen slapped his knee. 'Eva, I believe Butsey has the diamonds. For all I know he may have shot your father.'

"Oh, Allen," said Eva, turning pale, "that lad!"

"A boy can kill with a pistol as easily as if he were a man and Butsey has no more scruples. However, we'll wait till he comes and then learn what we can. Once I get hold of him he shan't get away until I know everything. As to Merry, if he comes, you let me know and I'll break his confounded neck."

"I believe Nanny would thank you if you did," said Eva. "the poor woman is in a terrible fright. He wrote saying he was coming to see her."

"She needn't have anything to do with him."

"I told her so. But she looks on the man as her husband, bad as he is, and has old fashioned notions about obeying him. If he wasn't her husband she wouldn't mind, but as it is—" Eva shrugged her shoulders.

They heard the sound of footsteps approaching the door. Shortly the footman entered. "There's a woman to see you, miss," he said to Eva, holding the door open. "Mrs Merry, miss."

"What!" cried Eva, "show her in."

"She won't come, miss. She's in the hall."

"Come, Allen," said the girl, and

they went out into the hall where Mrs Merry with a scared face was sitting She rose and came forward in tears, and with sopping clothes, owing to her walk through the heavy rain

"I ran all the way, Miss Eva I'm in such sorrow Giles has come"

"What your husband?" said Allen

"Yes, and worse I found this on the doorstep"

She drew from under her shawl the wooden hand!

CHAPTER XX

AN AMAZING CONFESSION

Mr and Mrs Merry were seated the next day in the kitchen having a long chat It was not a pleasant one, for Mrs Merry was weeping as usual, and reproaching her husband Giles had been out to see his old cronies in the village, and consequently had imbibed sufficient liquor to make him quarrelsome The first thing he did, when he flung himself into a chair, was to grumble at the kitchen

"Why should we sit here, Selina?" he asked, "it's a blamed dull hole, and I'm accustomed to drawing-rooms"

"You can't go into the drawing-room," said Mrs Merry, rocking and dabbing her red eyes with the corner of her apron "Miss Eva is in there with a lady They don't want to be disturbed"

"Who is the lady?" demanded Signor Antonio, alias Mr Merry

"Lady Ipsen She's Miss Eva's grandmother and have called to see her What about, I'm sure I don't know, unless it's to marry her to Lord Saltars, not that I think much of him"

"Lady Ipsen—old Lady Ipsen?" said Giles slowly, and his eyes brightened, "she's an old devil I know her in the days when I and Hill and Strode enjoyed ourselves."

"And bad old days they were," moaned Mrs Merry, "you'd have been a better man, Giles, if it hadn't been for that Strode As for the jelly fish, he was just a shade weaker than you Both of you were under the thumb of Strode, wicked man that he was, and so cruel to his wife, just as you are, Giles, though you mayn't think so But if I die——"

"You will, if you go on like this," said Merry, producing his pipe, "this is a nice welcome Old Lady Ipsen," he went on, and laughed in so unpleasant a manner, that his wife looked up apprehensively

"What wickedness are you plotting now?" she asked timidly

"Never you mind The marriage of Lord Saltars," he went on with a chuckle "Ho! he's going to marry Miss Lorry"

"So they say But I believe Lady Ipsen wants to stop that marriage, and small blame to her, seeing what a man he——"

"Hold your jaw, Selina I can't hear you talking all day You get me riz and you'll have a bad time, old girl So go on rocking and crying and hold that red rag of yours D'ye hear?"

"Yes, Giles but Lord Saltars—"

"He's going to marry Miss Lorry, if I let him"

Mrs Merry allowed the apron to fall from her eyes in sheer astonishment "If you let him?" she repeated "lor, Giles, you can't stop his lordship from——"

"I can stop *her*," said Merry, who seemed determined never to let his wife finish a sentence, "and I've a mind to, seeing how nasty she's trying to make herself" He rose "I'll see Miss Eva and make trouble"

"If you do, Mr Allen will interfere," said Mrs Merry vigorously "I knew you'd make trouble It's in your nature But Miss Lorry wrote to Miss Eva and said she'd

interfere if you meddled with what ain't your business"

Giles shook off the hand his wife had laid on his arm and dropped into a chair He seemed dumfounded by the information "She'll interfere, will she? said he, snarling, and with glittering eyes "Like her impudence She can't hurt me in any way- --'

"She may say you killed Strode," said Mrs. Merry

Giles raised a mighty fist with so evil a face, that the woman cowered in her chair Giles smiled grimly and dropped his arm

"You said before, as I'd killed Strode Well then, I didn't'

"How do I know that?' cried wife spiritedly, "you can strike me but speak the truth I will But as you are, I don't want to see you hanged, and hanged you will be, whatever you may say I heard from Cam that you talked to Strode on the Wednesday night he was killed You met him at the station, when he arrived by the six-thirty, and '

"What's that got to do with the murder?" snapped Giles sharply 'I talked to him only as a pal'

"Your wicked London friends were there too said Mrs Merry "oh, Cam told me of the lot you are in with, Father Don, Foxy, and Red Jerry they were all down at Westhaven and that boy Butsey too, as lied to me You sent him here to lie Cam said so"

"I'll break Cam's head if he chatters What if my pals were at Westhaven? what if I did speak to Strode- "

"You was arranging to have him shot,' said Mrs Merry, "and shot him yourself for all I know'

Signor Antonio leaped and taking his wife by the shoulders, shook her till her head wagged "There," he said, while she gasped, "you say much more and I'll knock you on the head with a poker, you poll parrot I was doing my turn at the circus at the time Strode was shot, if he was shot at nine on Wednesday as the doctor said I saw the evidence in the paper You can't put the crime on me"

"Then your pals did it"

"No, they didn't They wanted the diamonds, it's true --"

"They struck him down and robbed him

"You said they shot him just now," sneered Giles with an evil face, "don't know your own silly mind, it seems Cut'n, you fool, there was nothing on him to rob If my pals had shot him they'd have collared the wooden hand That was the token to get the diamonds as Red Jerry said But Mask hasn't got them, and though Father Don did open the hand he found nothing"

"Open the hand?' questioned Mrs Merry curiously

"Yes We found out I found out, and in a way which ain't got nothing to do with you, that the hand could be opened It was quite empty Then Father Don put it aside and that brat Butsey prigged it Much good may it do him'

"The wooden hand was put on the doorstep last night said Mrs Merry, and I gave it to Miss Eva

The man's face grew black 'Oh you did did you, he said, 'instead of giving it to your own lawful husband? I've a mind to smash you' he raised his fist again, and his poor wife winced then he changed his mind and dropped it "But you ain't worth blow, you white faced screeching cat I'll see Miss Eva and make her give up the hand myself" See if I don't'

Mr Allen will interfere'

'Let him, smiled Merry, "I know something as will settle him I want that hand, and I'm going to have it Get those diamonds I will, wherever they are I believe Butsey's got 'em. He's just the sort of little devil as would have opened that hand, and found the paper inside, telling where the diamonds were'

"But did he have the hand?'

"Yes, he did He dug up the hand —never mind where--and brought it

to me. It was empty then. Yes, I believe Butsey has the diamonds, so the hand will be no go Miss Eva can keep it if she likes, or bury it along with that infernal Strode, who was a mean cuss to round on his pals the way he did"

"Ah! he was a bad man," sighed Mrs Merry; "and did he—?—?"

"Shut up and mind your own business," said Giles in surly tones He thought he had said too much 'Its that Butsey I must look for He stole the hand from Father Don and left it on your doorstep, for Miss Eva, I suppose He must be in the place, so I'll look for him I know the brat's playing us false, but his father's got a rod in pickle for him, and - -"

"Oh, Giles, Giles, you'll get into trouble again That Wasp -'

"I'll screw his neck if he meddles with me," said the strong man savagely, "see here, Selina, I'm not going to miss a chance of making a fortune Those diamonds are worth forty thousand pounds, and Butsey's got them I want money to hunt him down and to do other things," said Giles, hesitating, "have you got five hundred?"

"No," said Mrs Merry with spirit, "and you shouldn't have it if I had You're my husband, Giles, worse luck, and so long as you behave yourself, I'll give you roof and board, though you are not a nice man to have about the house, but money you shan't have I'll see Mr Mask first He's looking after my property, and if you——"

"I'll do what I like, said Giles, wincing at the name of Mask, "if I wasn't your husband, you'd chuck me, I 'spose"

"I would," said Mrs Merry, setting her mouth, "but you're married to me, worse luck I can't get rid of you See here, Giles, you go away and leave me and Cain alone, and I'll give you five pounds.'

"I want five hundred," said Giles, "I'll stop here as long as I like I'm quite able to save myself from being accused of Strode's murder. As to Cain," Giles chuckled, "he's taken up with a business you won't like, Selina"

"What is it?—oh, what is it?" gasped Mrs Merry, clasping her hands.

"The Salvation Army"

"What! Has he joined the Salvation Army?"

"Yes," sneered the father, "he chucked the circus at Chelmsford, and said it was a booth of Satan. Now he's howling about the street in a red jersey, and talking pious"

Mrs Merry raised her thin hands to heaven "I thank God He has found the light, she said solemnly, "I'm Methodist myself, but I hear the Army does much good If the Army saves Cain's immortal soul," said the woman, weeping fast, "I'll bless its work on my bended knees I believe Cain will be a comfort to me after all Where are you going, Giles—not to the drawing-room?"

'As far as the door to listen," growled Merry "I'm sick of hearing you talk pious I'll come and stop here, and twist Cain's neck if he prays at me"

"Trouble—trouble,' wailed Mrs Merry, wringing her hands, "I wish you'd go Cain and me would be happier without you, whatever you may say, Giles, or Signor Antonio, or whatever wickedness you call yourself Oh, I was a fool to marry you!"

Giles looked at her queerly "Give me five hundred pounds, and I won't trouble you again," he said, "meanwhile'—he moved towards the door Mrs Merry made a bound like a panther and caught him

"No,' she said, "you shan't listen"

Giles swept her aside like a fly, and she fell on the floor Then with a contemptuous snort he left the kitchen and went into the passage which led to the front. On the right of this was the door of the drawing-room, and as both walls and door were thin, Mr. Merry had no difficulty in overhearing what was going on within. Could his eyes have seen through a deal board, he would have beheld an old lady

seated in the best arm chair, supporting herself on an ebony crutch She wore a rich black silk and had white hair, a fresh complexion, a nose like the beak of a parrot and a firm mouth The expression of the face was querulous and ill-tempered, and she was trying to bring Eva round to her views on the subject of Saltar's marriage The girl sat opposite her, very pale, but with quite as determined an expression as her visitor

"You are a fool," said Lady Ipsen striking her crutch angrily on the ground "I am your grandmother, and speak for your good"

"It is rather late to come and speak for my good now" said Eva with great spirit, "you have neglected me for a long time"

"I had my reasons," said the other sharply "I, your mother, married against my will He was of good birth certainly, but he had no money, and besides was a bad man"

"There is no need to speak evil of the dead

"The man's being dead doesn't make him a saint, Eva but I'll say no more about him if you'll only listen to reason

"I have listened, and can have my answer," said Eva quietly "I am engaged to Allen Hill and Allen Hill I intend to marry"

Never, while I have a breath of life," said the old woman angrily "Do you think I am going to let Saltars marry this envious woman? No! I'll have him put in gaol first He shall not disgrace the family in this way Our sons take wives from theatres and music-halls," said Lady Ipsen grandly, "but the sawdust is lower than other I shall allow the future head of the house to disgrace himself"

"All this has nothing to do with me," said Eva

"It has everything to do with you," said Lady Ipsen quickly "Don't I tell you that Saltars, since he saw you at their Mrs Palmer's, has taken a fancy to you? It would take very little for you to detach him from this wretched Miss Lorry"

"I don't want to, Lady Ipsen!"

"Call me grandmother

"No You have never been a grandmother to me"

"I will be now," Lady Ipsen tried to soften her grim face, "I wish I'd seen you before," she added, "you're a true Delham with very little of that bad Strode blood in you, unless in the obstinacy you display I'll take you away from this Mrs Palmer, Eva —"

"I have no wish to leave Mrs Palmer"

"You must I won't have a granddaughter of mine remain in a situation with a common woman

"Leave Mrs Palmer alone Lady Ipsen She is a good woman, and when my relatives forsook me she took me up If you had ever loved me or desired to behave as you should have done you would have come to help me when my father was murdered And now," cried Eva rising, with flashing eyes, "you come when I am settled to get me to help you with your schemes I decline"

The old woman grew white and with shifting eyes rose "You mean then to marry Allen Hill?"

"Yes I do"

"Well then you can't" snapped the old woman, "his mother isn't respectable

"How dare you say that?" demanded Eva angrily

"Because I'm accustomed to speak my mind" snapped Lady Ipsen, glaring, "it is not what like you will make me hold my peace Mrs Hill was in our family as a governess before your father married my daughter Jane"

"What of that?"

"Simply this a valuable diamond necklace was lost an heirloom I believe Mrs Hill stole it"

Eva laughed "I don't believe that for one moment," she said scornfully "Mrs Hill is a good, kind, sweet lady"

"Lady she is, as she comes of good

stock Sweet I never thought her, and kind she may be to you, seeing she is trying to trap you into marrying her miserable son — "

"Don't you call Allen miserable," said Eva, annoyed, "he is the best man in the world, and worth a dozen of Lord Saltars"

"That would not be difficult said Lady Ipsen, sneering, Saltars is a fool and a profligate'

'And you expect me to marry him ?"

"To save him from disgracing the family'

"The Delham family is nothing to me,' said Eva proudly, 'look after the honour of the family yourself, Lady Ipsen As to this talk about Mrs Hill, I don't believe it

"Ask her yourself then

'I shall do so and even if what you say is true, which I don't believe, I shall still marry Allen'

'Eva," the old lady dropped into her seat 'don't be hard on me I am old I wish you well It is true what I say about Mrs Hill You can't marry her son '

"But I can and I intend to

"Oh, this marriage this disgraceful marriage ! cried the old woman in despair 'how can I manage to stop it This Miss Lorry will be married to Saltars soon, if I can't put an end to his infatuation'

Eva shrugged her shoulders "I can give you no help"

"You might plead with Saltars '

"No, I can't do that It is his business, not mine Why don't you offer Miss Lorry a sum of money to decline the match ?'

"Because she's bent upon being Lady Saltars, and will stop at nothing to achieve her end I would give five hundred -a thousand pounds to stop the marriage But Miss Lorry can't be bribed'

It was at this point that Giles opened the door softly and looked in "Make it fifteen hundred, your ladyship, and I'll stop the marriage," he said impudently

"Giles," cried Eva, rising indignantly, "how dare you——"

"Because I've been listening, and heard a chance of making money"

Mrs Merry burst in at her husband's heels "And I couldn't stop him from listening, Miss Eva," she said, weeping, "he's a brute Don't give him the money, your ladyship, he's a liar !'

"I'm not," said Giles coolly, "for fifteen hundred pounds I can stop this marriage I have every reason to hate Miss Lorry She's been playing low down on me, in writing to you, Miss Strode, and it's time she learned I won't be put on Well, your ladyship ?'

The old woman, who had kept her imperious black eyes fixed on Giles, nodded "Can you really stop the marriage ?'

"Yes I can, and pretty sharp too '

"Then do so and you'll have the fifteen hundred pounds"

"Will you give me some writing to that effect ?"

"Yes," said Lady Ipsen, becoming at once a business woman, 'get me some ink and paper, Eva"

'Stop,' said Giles politely —so very politely that his poor wife stared "I don't doubt your ladyship's word Promise me to send to this address," he handed a bill containing the next place where Stag's Circus would perform, 'one thousand five hundred in notes and I'll settle the matter"

"I'll bring the money myself,' said Lady Ipsen, putting away the bill, "you don't get the money till I know the truth How can you stop the marriage ? Tell me now"

'Oh I don't mind that,' said Giles, shrugging "I'm sure you won't break your word, and even if you were inclined to you can't, if you want to stop the marriage You can't do without me '

'Speak out, man," said Lady Ipsen sharply.

"Well then ——" began Giles and then hesitated, as he looked at poor faded Mrs Merry in her black stuff

dress "Selina you give me fifteen hundred pounds and I'll not speak"

"What have I got to do with it?" asked his wife, staring

"It will be worth your while to pay me," said Merry threateningly

"I can't and I won't, whatever you may say Tell Lady Ipson what you like. Your wickedness hasn't anything to do with me"

"You'll see," he retorted turning to the old lady "I've given you the chance Lady Ipson, I accept your offer Lord Saltars can't marry Miss Lorry because that lady — —"

"Well, man, well"

"That lady" said Giles "is married already"

"Who to?" asked Eva, while Lady Ipson's eyes flashed

"To me" said Merry, "I married her years ago before I met Selina"

"Then I am free free," cried Eva's nurse "oh thank heaven!" and she fell down on the floor in a faint for the first and last time in her life"

CHAPTER XXI

THE DIAMONDS

At seven o'clock that same evening Allen and his American friend were walking to Mrs Palmer's to dine As yet, Allen knew nothing of what had happened at Misery Castle, for Eva was keeping the story till they met But as the two men passed the little inn they saw Giles Merry descend from a holiday making *char-a-banc* Two or three men had just passed into the inn, no doubt to seek liquid refreshment Allen knew Merry's face, as Mrs Merry had shown him a photograph of Signor Antonio in stage dress, which she had obtained from Cain The man was a handsome and noticeable blackguard, and moreover his good looks were reproduced in Cain Therefore young Hill knew him at once, and stepped forward

"Good evening, Mr Merry," he said, "I have long wished to meet you"

Giles looked sullen "My name is Signor Antonio, monsieur," he said

"Oh," mocked Allen, "and being Italian you speak English and French badly?"

"What do you want?" demanded Giles savagely, and becoming the English gipsy at once "I've no time to waste!"

"Why did you send that cross to Mr Hill?"

Giles grinned "Just to give him a fright," he said "I knew he was a milk and-water fool, as I saw a lot of him in the old days, when I did Strode's dirty work"

"You dug up the wooden hand?"

"No, I didn't But Betsy, who was on the watch, saw Hill plant it and dug it up He brought it to me, and I gave it to Father Don Then Betsey stole it back, and passed it along to that young woman you're going to marry"

"I guess," said Horace at this point, "you'd best speak civil of Miss Strode I'm not taking any insolence this day"

Allen nodded approval, and Giles cast a look over the big limbs of the American Apparently, strong man as he was, he thought it would be best not to try conclusions with such a giant "I wish I'd met you in Father Don's den," he said "I'd have smashed that handsome face of yours"

"Two can play at that game," said Allen quietly, "and now, Mr Merry, or Signor Antonio, or whatever you choose to call yourself, why shouldn't I hand you over to Wasp?"

"You can't bring any charge against me

"Oh, can't I? You know something about this murder — —"

"I was playing my turn at the circus in Westhaven when the shot was fired," said Giles coolly

"I didn't say you shot the man yourself, but you know who did"

"No, I don't," said Merry, his face

growing dark, "If I did know the man, I'd make him a present. I'd like to have killed Strode myself He played me many a dirty trick, and I said I'd be even with him But some one else got in before me As to arrest," he went on sneeringly, "don't you think I'd be such a fool as to come down here, unless I was sure of my ground? Arrest me indeed!"

"I can on suspicion You're in with the Perry Street gang"

Giles cast a look towards the inn and laughed "Well, you've got to prove that I and the rest have done wrong, before you can run us all in"

"The wooden hand——"

"Oh, we know all about that, and who stole it," said Giles meaningly

Allen started He saw well enough that he could not bring Giles to book without mentioning the name of his father Therefore he changed his mind about calling on Wasp to interfere, and contented himself with a warning 'You'd best clear out of this by to morrow," said he angrily "I shan't have you troubling your wife"

"My wife! Ha—ha!" Merry seemed to find much enjoyment in the remark

"Or Miss Strode either"

"Oh,' sneered the man insolently, "you'd best see Miss Strode She may have something interesting to tell you But I can't stay talking here for ever I'm going back to Shanton to night Come round at eleven," he said to the driver of the *char-a-banc* "We'll drive back in the moonlight"

"I think you'd better,' said Allen grimly, "you stop here to morrow, and whatever you may know about a person, whose name need not be mentioned, I'll have you run in"

"Oh, I'll be gone by to-morrow,' sneered Merry again, and took his cap off with such insolence that Horace longed to kick him, "don't you fret yourself. I'm a gentleman of property now, and intend to cut the sawdust and go to South Africa—where the diamonds come from," he added with an insolent laugh, and then swung into the inn, leaving Allen fuming with anger. But there was no use in making a disturbance, as the man could make things unpleasant for Mr. Hill, so Allen walked away with Horace to Mrs Palmer's

It would have been wiser had he entered the inn, for in the coffee-room were three men, whom he might have liked to meet These were Father Don smartly dressed as a clergyman, Red Jerry as a sailor, and Foxy in a neat suit of what are known as hand-me-downs The trio looked most respectable, and if Jerry's face was somewhat villainous, and Foxy's somewhat sly, the benevolent looks of Father Don were above suspicion Giles sat down beside these at a small table, and partook of the drinks which had been ordered The landlord was under the impression that the three men were over on a jaunt from Shanton and intended to return in the moonlight Merry had met them at the door and now came in to tell them his plans

"I've arranged matters," he said in a low voice to Father Don, "the groom Jacobs is courting some young woman he's keeping company with, and the women servants have gone to a penny reading the vicar's giving"

"What of young Hill and his friend?"

"They are dining with Mrs Palmer The house is quite empty, and contains only Mr and Mrs Hill I have been in the house before, and know every inch of it I'll tell you how to get in"

"You'll come also?" said Foxy suspiciously

"No, replied Giles "I'll stop here I've done enough for the money If you're fools enough to be caught, I shan't be mixed up in the matter"

"We won't be caught," said Father Don with a low laugh, "Jerry will keep guard at the window, and Foxy and I will enter"

"How?" asked the sharp-faced man

"By the window, said Giles. "I explained to Father Don here, in London Hill has taken up his quarters

in a Japanese room on the west side of the house, just over the wall There are French windows opening on to the lawn You can steal up and the grass will deaden the sound of footsteps It goes right up to the window That may be open If not Jerry can burst it and then you and Don can enter

"But if Hill isn't alone"

"Well then, act as you think best Mrs Hill's twice the man her husband is She might give the alarm But there's no one in the house, and she'll have to sing out pretty loudly before the alarm can be given to the village"

"There won't be any alarm," said Father Don calmly I intend to make use of that paper I got from you Where did you get it, Mary?"

"From Bursey I found him with Stroude's pocket book, and made a grab at it I saw notes But Bursey caught those and bolted I got the book and some papers The one I gave you, Don will make Hill give up the diamond, if he has them"

"He must have them," said Don decidedly, "we know from the letter sent to Mask and which was left at his office by Bursey, that the hand could be opened I did open it and found nothing I believe that Stroude stored the diamonds therein If Hill stole the hand and took it home, he must have found the diamonds, and they are now in his possession I expect he took it for them"

"No," said Merry grimly "he was looking for that paper you intend to show him He'll give up the diamonds sure enough when he sees that Then you can make for Westhaven"

"What of the charity bazaar?" asked Jerry in heavy tones

"That's a blind It will come round at eleven, but by that time we will all be on our way to Westhaven If there is pursuit, Wasp and his friend will follow in the wrong direction Then Father Don can make for Antwerp, and later we can sell the diamonds But no balks," said Merry, showing his teeth, "or there will be trouble"

"Suppose young Hill and his friend tell the police?"

"Oh," said Giles, grinning "they will do so at the risk of the contents of that paper being made public Don't be a fool, Don, you've got the whole business in your own hands I don't want a row, as I have to meet a lady in a few days," Giles grinned again, when he thought of Lady Ipson, "and we have to do business"

So the plan was arranged, and after another drink Father Don and his three friends went out for a stroll in the village to "see the venerable church in the moonlight," as the pseudo clergyman told the landlord But when out of sight, the two changed the direction of their walk, and made for The Arabian Nights at the end of the village Deputing from the high road they stole across a large meadow, and, in dark order, climbed the wall Father Don was as active as any of them in spite of his age When the three vagrants were over the wall and standing on smoothly-shaven lawn they saw the range of the Roman pillars, but no light in the windows "It's on the west side," said Don in a whisper "come along, pal"

The three crept round the black bulk of the house and across the drive All was silent and peaceful within the boundary of the wall The moonlight silvered the trees and flower beds and made beautiful the grotesque architecture of the house A few steps taken in great like fashion brought the thieves to the west side They here saw a light glimmering through three French windows which opened on to a narrow stone terrace From this, the lawn rolled smoothly to the flower-beds, under the encircling red brick wall Father Don pointed to the three windows

"The middle one," he said quietly, "see if it's open, Foxy If not we'll have to make a certain noise And look inside if you can"

Foxy stole across the lawn and terrace and peered in After a time,

he delicately tried the window and shook his head He then stole back to report "Hill is lying on the sofa," he said, "and his wife is seated beside him He's crying about something"

"We'll give him something to cry about soon," said Father Don, feeling for the paper which he had received from Giles "Smash the middle window in, Jerry"

Without the least concealment the huge man rushed up the slope and hurled his bulk against the window The frail glass gave way and he fairly fell into the centre of the room With a shrill cry of terror, Hill sprang from the sofa, convulsively clutching the hand of his wife, while Mrs Hill, after the first shock of alarm, faced the intruders boldly By this time Father Don with Foxy behind him was bowing to the disturbed couple Jerry took himself out of the room and guarded the broken window

"Who are you? what do you want?" demanded Mrs Hill "If you don't go I'll ring for the servants"

"I am afraid you will save yourself unnecessary trouble" said Don suavely "We know the servants are out"

"What do you want?"

"We'll come to that presently Our business has to do with your husband, Mr Hill —Father Don looked at the shivering wretch

"I never harmed you—I don't know you," mumbled Hill "Go away —leave me alone—what do you want?"

"We'll never get on in this way No, you don't," added Don, as Mrs Hill tried to steal to the door "Go and sit down by your good husband," and he enforced this request by pointing a revolver

"I am not to be frightened by melodrama," said Mrs Hill scornfully

"Sit down, Sarah—sit down," said Hill, his teeth chattering

The woman could not help casting a contemptuous look on the coward, even though she fancied, she owed so much to him But, as she was a most sensible woman, she saw that it would be as well to obey "I am ready to hear," she said, sitting by Hill, and putting her strong arm round the shivering, miserable creature

"I'll come to the point at once," said Don, speaking to Hill, "as we have not much time to lose Mr Hill, you have forty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds here Give them up!"

Hill turned even paler than he was "How do you know that?" he asked

"It can't be true," put in Mrs Hill spiritedly "If you are talking of Mr Stroole's diamonds, my husband hasn't got them"

"Your husband stole the wooden hand from the dead," said Foxy with his usual snarl "He took it home and opened it

"I did not know it contained the diamonds," babbled Hill

"No You thought it contained a certain document" said Don, and produced a paper from his pocket, "a blue paper document, not very large of such a size as might go into a wooden hand, provided the hand was hollow as it was Is this it?"

Hill gave a scream and springing up bounded forward "Give it to me give it!" he cried

"For the diamonds," said Father Don putting the paper behind him

"You shall have them I had them in this room I don't want them, but that paper—it is mine"

"I know that signed with your name, isn't it Well, bring out the diamonds, and, when you hand them over——

"You'll give me the paper?"

Foxy shook his head as Father Don looked inquiringly at him "No, we must keep that paper, so as to get away—otherwise you'll be setting the police on our track"

"I swear I won't—I swear——" Hill dropped on his knees, "I swear——"

His wife pulled him to his feet "Try and be a man, Lawrence," she said. "What is this document?"

"Nothing—nothing—but I must have it," cried Hill jerking himself away. He ran across the room, and fumbled at the lock of a cabinet. "See—see! I have the diamonds! I found them in the hand—I put them into a canvas bag—here—here——" his fingers shook so that he could hardly open the drawer. Foxy came forward and kindly helped him. Between the two, the drawer was opened. Hill flung out a mass of papers which strewed the floor. Then from beneath these, he hauled a small canvas bag tied at the mouth and sealed. "All the diamonds are here," he said, bringing this to Don and trying to open it. "Forty thousand pounds—forty—for a song! Take! he broke off hysterically—the paper, the paper! Signed!"

Don took possession of the bag and was about to hand over the document, which Foxy snatched it. "We'll send this from the Continent," he said; "while we have this you won't be able to set the peelers on us."

Hill began to cry and again fell on his knees, but Father Don took no notice of him. He emptied the contents of the bag on the table and there the jewels flashed in the lamp light, a small pile of very fine stones. While he gloated over them, Mrs Hill laid her hand on Foxy's arm. "What is in that paper?" she asked sternly.

"Don't tell her—don't tell her?" cried Hill.

"Lawrence!"

But he put his hands to his ears and still cried and grovelled. "I shall go mad if you tell her! I shall—ah—oh—ugh——!" he suddenly clutched at his throat and reeled to the sofa.

Mrs Hill took little notice of him. "Read me the document," she said.

"I can almost repeat it from memory," said Foxy, putting the paper into his pocket, "it's simply a confession by your husband that he stole a certain necklace belonging to——"

"The Delham heirloom!" cried Mrs Hill, turning grey, and recoiling.

"Yes, and also a promise to withdraw from seeking to marry Lady Jane Delham, and to marry you."

"Oh!" Mrs Hill turned such a withering look on her miserable husband, that he shrank back and covered his eyes. "So this is the real reason of your chivalry?"

"Yes," said Father Don, who had placed the diamonds again in his bag, and stood up, "I heard some of the story from Giles Merry, and read the rest in the signed document. It was Hill who stole the necklace. He took the key from the schoolroom where it had been left by Lady Ipsen. He opened the safe, and collared the necklace. Near the door, he left a handkerchief of yours, Mrs Hill, so that, if there was danger you might be accused. Strode found the handkerchief, and knowing Hill had possessed it, made him confess. Then he made Hill sign the confession that he had stolen the necklace, and also made him promise to marry you."

Mrs Hill sank down with a stern, shamed look. "So this was your chivalry," she said, looking again at her husband; "you stole the necklace—you let me bear the shame—you tried to incriminate me—you pretended to wed me to save me from starvation, and—oh, you—you shameless creature!" she leaped, and made as though she would have struck Hill, the man cowered with a cry of alarm like a trapped rabbit.

"What became of the necklace?" she asked Don sharply.

"Strode made Hill sell it, and they divided the profits."

"Eva's father also," moaned Mrs Hill, covering her face; "oh, shame—shame—shall I ever be able to look on this man's face again!"

Hill attempted to excuse himself. "I didn't get much money," he wailed. "I let Strode take the lot. He carried the confession in his wooden hand—that's why I took it. I stole the hand and opened it—but the confession

wasn't in it—I found the diamonds, and I have given them to you—let me have the paper!" he bounded to his feet, and snatching a dagger from a trophy of arms on the wall made for Foxy, "I'll kill you if you don't give it to me!"

Father Don dodged behind a chair, while Foxy, who was right in the centre of the room, ran for the window, and, bursting past Jerry, raced down the lawn with Hill after him, the dagger upraised. Round and round they went, while Mrs. Hill stood on the terrace, looking on with a deadly smile. Had Hill been struck down, she would have rejoiced. Don twitched the arm of Jerry.

"Let's out," he said, "I've got the swag, Foxy can look after himself," and these two gentlemen left the house hurriedly.

Mrs. Hill saw them disappear without anxiety. The blow she had received seemed to have benumbed her faculties. To think that she had been so deceived and tricked. With a stony face she watched Foxy flying round the lawn with the insane man—for Hill appeared to be mad—after him. Foxy, in deadly terror of his life, seeing his pals disappear, tore the document from his pocket, threw it down, and ran panting towards the wall. While he scaled it, Hill picked up the paper and tore it, with teeth and hands, into a thousand shreds. The three scoundrels had disappeared, and Mrs. Hill looked down coldly on her frantic husband. Hill danced up to the terrace, and held out his hands. "Happiness—happiness, I am safe."

"Coward," she said in a terrible voice. Her husband looked at her, and then began to laugh weakly. Then with a cry, he dropped.

"I hope he is dead," said Mrs. Hill, looking down on him with scorn.

CHAPTER XXII

BUTSEY'S STORY

There was no excitement in Wargrove next day over the burglary who had entered "The Arabian Nights," for the simple reason that the village knew nothing about the matter. But a rumour was current, that Mr. Hill had gone out of his mind. No one was astonished, as he had always been regarded as queer. Now, it appeared, he was stark, staring mad, and no longer the harmless eccentric the village had known for so long. And the rumour was true.

"It is terrible to think of the punishment which has befallen him, Allen," said Mrs. Hill the next morning, "but can we call it undeserved?"

"I suppose not," answered her son gloomily. "I wish I had remained at home last night, mother."

"Things would have been worse, had you remained. There would have been a fight."

"I would have saved Eva's diamonds, at all events."

"Let the diamonds go, Hill," claimed in Parkins, who formed a third in the conversation, "they were come by dishonestly, and would have brought no luck. You come out to Bolivia, and fix up the mine. Then you can make your own coin, and marry Miss Strode."

"But you forget, Mr. Parkins," said Mrs. Hill, "I am now rich, and Allen need not go to America."

"No, mother," said Allen hastily, "I'll go. You will do much more good with my father's money than I can. Besides——" he hesitated, and looked at Horace. The American interpreted the look.

"Guess you want a little private conversation," he said, "well, I'll light out and have a smoke. You can call me when you want me again," and Mr. Parkins, producing his pipe, left the room.

"My poor mother," said Allen,

embracing her, "don't look so sad It is very terrible and— —"

"You can't console me Allen, said the poor woman bitterly, "so do not try to To think that I should have believed in that man all these years He was a thief doubly a thief he not only robbed the Delhams of the necklace, but robbed the dead and me of my good name"

"I almost think the dead deserved to be robbed said Allen "I begin to believe, mother, that Strode was my father's evil genius as he said he was Why should my father steal this necklace, when he had plenty of money"

"He did not at the time I fancy his father kept him short He took the necklace I expect under the strong temptation of finding it lying in the school room"

"I believe Strode urged him to steal it said Allen "and at all events Strode was not above profiting by the theft And it was Strode who brought about the marriage"

"By the bye said Mrs Hill grimly "I expect, Strode swore he would reveal the truth unless Lawrence married me And Lawrence never was so out of chivalry"

"But if Strode had revealed the truth he would have incriminated himself

"Ah but, as I learn, he waited till after I was married before he disposed of the necklace Then he sold it through Father Don who was his associate in villany However Strode is dead and your father is dead I wonder what fate will befall Merry and those wretches he associates with"

"Oh, then sins will come home to them, never fear," said Allen in a prophetic voice "I suppose it is best to let the matter rest"

"Certainly Father Don and his two associates have got away What about Merry"

"He went almost at once to Shanton, and did not pay for the *chiffonier-bane* The owner is in a fine rage and drove back to Shanton at midnight, vowing to summons Merry, who was responsible for its ordering"

"Well, they are out of our life at last," said his mother, "we now know the secret which caused your unhappy father to try and murder Strode, and did make him steal the hand The confession has been destroyed, so no one can say anything Merry will not speak— "

"No, that's all right Merry is going to receive money from old Lady Ipsen for stopping the marriage of Sylvas with Miss Lorry I expect he will go to Africa as he says He'll hold his tongue and so will the others But the have the diamonds, and poor Eva receive nothing

"I agree with Mr Perkins, said Mrs Hill quickly, "the jewels were come by dishonestly and would have brought no good fortune Will you tell Eva anything Allen"

"No I'll tell her as little as possible No one, but you, I, and Perkins know of the event of last night My poor father has been reported ill for some time and has always been so eccentric, so it will surprise no one to hear he has gone mad We will place him in some private asylum and—"

"No Allen said Mrs Hill firmly, "the poor soul is harmless After all, wrongly as he has acted, he has been severely punished, and is my husband I'll keep him here and look after him till the end comes—and that won't be long, sighed Mrs Hill

"Very good, mother, you shall act as you think fit But we know the truth now

"Yes, save who murdered Mr Strode"

"I believe Jerry did, or Giles"

"They both deny doing so"

"Of course," said Allen contemptuously "to save their own skins I shall go up to London, mother, and tell Mr Mask what has taken place"

But there was no need for Allen to go to town That afternoon the

lawyer arrived and with him a small boy with one eye The lad was neatly dressed, he had his hair cut, and his face washed. In spite of his one eye and white cheeks he looked a very smart youngster, and grinned in a friendly manner at Allen and Horace

'This,' said Mr Mask, leading the lad into the room, where the young men were smoking after luncheon, "is Master Train- --'

"Butsey ?" said Allen

"Oh no," replied Mask gravely, "he is a gentleman of property now and is living on his money You mustn't call him by so low a name as Butsey"

The boy grinned and shrugged his shoulders "I say, how long's this a-goin' on ?" he inquired, "you've been shying fun at me all day"

"We won't shy fun any more' said Mr Mask in his melancholy voice "I have brought you here to make a clean breast of it"

"About the diamonds ?"

"We know about the diamonds,' said Horace "I guess Father Denis got them"

'Sakes! lies he ' said Butsey regretfully, 'that comes of me tellin' about the letter I guv to you'—this was to Mask—"if he hadn't opened the hand, he wouldn't have got 'em'

"You are quite wrong, Butsey," said Allen, rising "Horace, I'll leave the boy in your keeping Mr Mask, will you come with me into the next room ?"

Rather surprised, Mask did so, and was speedily put in possession of the terrible story He quite agreed that the matter should be kept quiet Though I hope it won't be necessary to raise it up when Butsey is tried for murder"

"What! did that boy shoot Mr Strode ?'

"I think so," said the lawyer, looking puzzled, "but to tell you the truth I'm not sure I can't get the boy to speak freely He said he would do so, only in the presence of you and Parkins That is why I brought him down"

"How did you get hold of him ?"

"Through one of the stolen notes Butsey presented himself at the bank and cashed ten pounds He was arrested and brought to me I gave bail for him, and brought him to explain"

"Where did he get the notes ?"

'Out of the blue pocket-book, he says—in which case he must have committed the murder Not for his own sake,' added Mask quickly 'I fear the poor little wretch has been made a cat's paw by the others"

"Well,' said Allen, drawing a long breath of astonishment, 'wonders will never cease I never thought Butsey was guilty

'I can't be sure yet if he is But, at all events, he certainly knows who is the culprit, and to save his own neck, he will confess

But would the law hang a boy like that even if guilty ?"

"I don't think Butsey will give the law the chance of trying the experiment He's a clever little reptile But we had better return and examine him Your mother ——?"

"She is with my poor father"

"Is that quite safe ?" asked Mask anxiously

"Perfectly He is harmless

Mask looked sympathetic, although he privately thought that madness was the best thing which could have befallen Mr Hill, seeing he had twice brought himself within the clutches of the law At least there was now no danger of his being punished for theft or attempted murder, whatever might be said by those who had escaped with the diamonds, and certainly Mrs Hill would be relieved of a very troublesome partner. Had Hill remained sane, she would not have lived with him after discovering how he had tricked her into marriage, and had traded on her deep gratitude all these years Now, by tending him in his hopeless state, she was heaping coals of fire on his head, and proving

herself to be, what Mask always knew she truly was, a good woman

So, in Allen's company, he returned to the room where Parkins was keeping watch over Master Train, and found that brilliant young gentleman smoking a cigarette "Produced it from a silver case too," said the amused American "This is a mighty smart boy I guess you got rid of a lot of that money, bub?"

"I cashed two notes," said Butsey coolly "but the third trapped me But I don't care I've had a good time!"

"And I expect you'll pass the rest of your life in gaol

"What's that?" said Butsey, not turning a hair, "in gaol? —[illegible] me I've been in quod once and didn't like it I ain't a-goin' again No sir you give me some cash, Mr Hill, and let's go to the States

"They'll lynch you there, as sure as a gun," said Horace grinning

Allen was quite taken aback by the coolness of the prisoner, for a prisoner Butsey virtually was Mask leaned back musing his foot and did not take much part in the conversation He listened to Allen examining the culprit, and only put a word in now and then

"You don't seem to realise your position," said Hill sharply

"Oh yuss I does," said Butsey, calmly blowing a cloud of smoke "you wants to get the truth out of me Well I'll tell it, if you'll let me go I dessy our friend here"—he nodded to Mask—"can arrange with the peelers about that note"

"It's probable I can" said Mask, tickled at the impudence of the boy, "but wouldn't you rather suffer for stealing, than for murder?"

The boy jumped up and became earnest at once "See here," he said, wetting his finger, "that's wet," and then he wiped it on his jacket, "that's dry, cut my throat if I tell a lie I didn't shoot the old bloke S'elp me, I didn't!"

"Who did, then? Do you know?"

"I might know but you've got to make it worth my while to split"

Allen took the boy by the collar and shook him "You young imp," he said, "you'll tell everything you know or pass some time in gaol"

"Make me tell, then," said Butsey, and put out his tongue

"Suppose I hand you over to Father Don and your own parent?"

"Can't, sir Th' gang's broke up They'll go abroad with them diamonds, and start in some other country 'Sides, I ain't going in for that business again I'm going to be respectable, I am And I did git you out of the den, sir," said Butsey more earnestly

Allen dropped his hand from the boy's collar "You certainly did that at the request of Miss Lorry What of her?"

"Nothing but good," said Butsey, flashing, "she's the best and kindest lady in the world I ain't a-goin' to say anything of her"

"I don't want you to talk of people who have nothing to do with the matter in hand" said Hill, "but you must tell us about the murder If you don't —"

"What am I a-goin' to get for splitting?" asked Butsey in a businesslike way

"I'll arrange that you won't go to gaol You must remember, Master Train," said Mask with deliberation, "that you are in a dangerous position The note you cashed was taken from a pocket-book which the murdered man had on his person, when he was shot How did you get it, eh? The presumption is that you shot him"

Butsey whistled between his teeth "You can't frighten me," said he, his one eye twinkling savagely, "but I'll tell you everything, 'cept who shot the bloke"

"Huh," said Horace "I guess we can ravel out that, when we know what you have to say But you speak straight, young man, or I'll hide you proper."

"Lor," said Butsey coolly, "I've bin hided by father and old Don much wuss than you can hammer. But I'll

tell—jest you three keep your ears open Where 'ull I begin?"

"From the beginning," said Allen; "how did the gang come to know that Strode had the diamonds?"

"It wos father told 'em," said Butsey candidly "Father's Red Jerry, an' a opener at that—my eye! He got into trouble here, and cuts to furrem parts some years ago In Africay he saw the dead bloke"

"Strode?"

"Well, ain't I a-sayin' of him?" snapped Butsey, "yuss—Strode Father comes orne in the same ship as Strode and knows all about 'im having prigged diamonds in Africay"

"What do you mean by prigged?"

"What I say, in course Strode got them diamonds wrong—"

"I D B," said Parkins "I told you so Hill

"Well then," went on Butsey looking mystified at the mention of the letters, "father didn't see why he shouldn't git the diamonds, so he followed the dead bloke to this here country and come to tell old Father Don in the Perry Street ken Father Don and Foxy both went in with father——"

"To *murder* Strode?" said Allen

"Not much" They wanted to rob him, but didn't want to dance on nothink Father Don's a fly one I was told about the job, an' sent to watch the dead bloke I watched him in London, and he wos never out of my sight He wos coming down to this here place on Thursday——"

"How do you know that?" asked Mask

"Cause I knows the 'all porter at the Guelph Hotel, an' he tells me," said Butsey calmly "I cuts an' tells Father Don, and him and father an' Foxy all come to Westhaven on Wednesday to see him as is called Merry"

"He's another of the gang?"

"Rather He's bin in with us fur years, he has. And he wos doin' the strong man at Stag's circus at Westhaven. Father Don, he come down, knowing Merry 'ated Strode, to try and get him to do the robbin'"

"Did Merry agree?"

"In course he did, only too glad to get a shot at Strode——"

"Do you mean to say Merry shot him?"

"Naow," said Butsey, making a gesture of irritation, "let a cove talk. I'll tell you if he shot him, if you'll let me I say we wos all down to fix things on Wednesday and I come along with a blessed ragged kids' fresh air fund, so as to make m self safe, if the police took a hand I didn't want to be mixed with no gang, having my good name to think of"

Horace grinned and rubbed his hands, but Allen frowned "Go on," he said sharply, "and don't play the fool"

"Oh, I m a goin' on," was the unruffled reply, "and I don't play th' fool without cause, d've see Well, I wos at the station at Westhaven, an' I sees Strode come I went off to tell Merry, and he comes to the station and talks to Strode"

"That was on Wednesday?"

"Yuss Strode sold us and come down, though we didn't 'ope to ave the pleasure of his company till Thursday Well, I tried to ear what Giles wos a saying, but he guves me a clip on the ear and sends me spinnin', so I couldn't 'ear I goes to complain to Father Don, an' when I gits back, Strode's away and Merry too He'd started walkin' to Wargrove, a porter tole me I wos about to foller, when Merry, he comes up and tells me, he'll go himself"

"That's a lie," said Allen "Merry was doing the strong man that night in the circus"

"No, he wasn't," grunned the boy "I went to the circus, havin' nothin' to do, and I saw the strong man It wos Cain Merry, his son, he's like his father, and could do the fakements. No one knew but the circus coves"

"Then Merry——?"

"He went after Strode. I told Father Don an' Foxy, an' they swore

awful They couldn't start after him, as they didn't know what 'ud happen, and Merry's an awful one when put out, so they waited along o' me, d've see? Next day Merry come back but said he'd left Strode a-goin to the Red Deeps'

"What did Father Don do?'

'He went to the Red Deeps an found the dead blóke Then he come back and saw Merry What he said to im I don't know but Father Don sent me with a telegram to send from the St James's Street office, saying that Strode wouldn't be down till Friday I think Father Don did that, to give some to Merry to get away

'That was the telegram received by Miss Strode after nine on Thursday, I think?" said Mask

"Yuss, said Butsey "I sent it early in' the lad es took it to Wingrove forgot it till late I comes down again from town gets back with the fresh an lids, same night to sell the peelers, an next mornin' I comes down agin to tell Mrs Merry es Cain would be over th' next day

"Why did you do that? Cain was in the house

'I knowed he wos But Merry sent me to see if Miss Eva hed heard o' the death Then I cuts-'

"One moment, said Allen "if Father Don saw the man dead, why didn't he take the wooden hand?

"'Cause he didn't know it wos worth anythin' till Mr Masks here spoke at the inquest'

"About its being delivered to get the diamonds?" said Mask, "quite so And you saw Mr Hill bury it?"

"Yuss I wos told to watch him, es Merry said he knew a lot about Strode, and if the wust come he might be accused——"

"A clever plot, Well?"

"I followed him and saw him bury something I digs it up and takes the cross es he put over it to mark it Then I gives the and to Father Don an the cross to Merry He sends it to Hill to frighten him, and sends it through Cain Then Father Don sees Mr. Mask, and you knows the rest."

"Not all, I guess," said Horace, stretching a long arm and shaking the boy, "say straight, you—you imp Did Merry shoot?"

"Of course he did," replied Butsey cheerfully, "he hated Strode, an' wanted to git them diamonds Merry hed the blue pocket book, fur when I come down to see Miss Lorry at Shanton, I took the book from Merry's box which wos in his room He found me with it and took it back, hammerin' me fin stealin' But I got the notes," added Butsey with satisfaction 'and I spent three'

"Merry seems to be guilty," said Mr Mask, "he was absent from the circus on that night and let his son who resembles him closely—take his place He had the pocket-book and——'

"Got the diamonds? No, he didn't,' said Butsey briskly, 'he didn't know es the hand would open I found that out from a letter I gave you Mr Mask, and tole ole Father Don He opened the hand- that wos arter he saw you, Mr Mask 'cos he foun' nothin Then he guessed es Hill- your father, Mr Allen—hid got the diamonds, seein' he had the han', while looking fin some paper An Merry got the paper out of the pocket-book,' said Butsey, 'an' showed it to Don Wot Don did with it I dunno'

'He got the diamonds with it," said Allen grimly, 'and has escaped But I don't think Merry will He's at Shanton now, as the circus is again there by particular request of the townsfolk We'll go over to night, Parkins, and see him perform then we'll catch him and make him confess"

"Will you have him arrested?" asked Horace coolly

"We'll see when the time comes," said Allen shortly "Mask——?"

'I'll remain here and look after this boy, Master Train"

Butsey made a grimace, but so the matter was arranged

CHAPTER XXIII

MISS LORRY'S LAST APPEARANCE

THERE was no doubt that Stag's circus was a great success at Shanton. Within a comparatively short period it had played three engagements in the little town, two performances each time, and on every occasion the tent was full. Now it was the very last night, as Stag announced, the circus would next turn its attention towards amusing the North. Consequently the tent was crammed to its utmost capacity, and Stag, loafing about in a fur coat, with a gigantic cigar, was in a very good humour.

Not so Miss Lorry. That lady was already dressed in riding-habit and tall hat to show off the paces of her celebrated stallion White Robin, and she sat in her caravan dressing-room fuming with anger. Miss Lorry always insisted on having a dressing-room to herself, although the accommodation in that way was small. But she had such a temper and was such an attraction that the great Stag consented she should be humoured in this way. She had a bottle of champagne beside her and was taking more than was good for her, considering she was about to perform with a horse noted for its bad temper. In her hand Miss Lorry held an open letter which was the cause of her wrath. It was from Saltars, written in a schoolboy hand, and announced that he could never marry her, as he was now aware through the dowager Lady Ipsen, that she, Miss Lorry, was a married woman. "I have been with the dowager to the church in London," said the letter, "so I know there's no mistake. I think you've treated me very badly. I loved you and would have made you my wife. Now everything is off, and I'll go back and marry my cousin Eva Shode."

There were a few more reproaches to the effect that the lady had broken the writer's heart, and although these were badly expressed and badly written, yet the accent of truth rang true. Miss Lorry knew well that Saltars had really loved her, and would not have given her up unless the result had been brought about by the machinations of the dowager. She ground her teeth and crushed up the letter in her hand.

"I'm done for," she said furiously. "I'd have given anything to have been Lady Saltars, and I could have turned that fool round my finger. I've risked a lot to get the position, and here I'm sold by that brute I married when I was a silly girl! I could kill him—kill him," she muttered, "and as it is, I've a good mind to thrash him," and so saying she grasped a riding-whip firmly. It was used to bring White Robin to subjection, but Miss Lorry was quite bold enough to try its effect on the human brute.

Shortly she sent a message for Signor Antonio, and in a few minutes Giles presented himself with a grin. He was ready to go on for his performance, and the fleshings showed off his magnificent figure to advantage. He looked remarkably handsome, as he faced the furious woman coolly, and remarkably happy when he thought of a certain parcel of notes he had that afternoon placed in the safe keeping of the Shanton Bank.

"Well, Bell," said he coolly, "so you know the worst, do you? You wouldn't look in such a rage if you didn't."

Miss Lorry raised her whip and brought it smartly across the eyes of Signor Antonio. "You hound!" she said, in a concentrated voice of hate, "I should like to kill you!"

Merry snatched at the whip, and, twisting it from her grip, threw it on the floor of the caravan. "That's enough," he said in a quietly dangerous voice. "You've struck me once. Don't do it again or I'll twist your neck."

"Oh, no, you won't," said Miss Lorry, showing her fine white teeth, "what do you mean by splitting?"

"I was paid to do so," said Merry coolly, "so now you know the worst, don't keep me chattering here all night I 'ave to go on soon"

"I have my turn first," said Miss Lorry, glancing at a printed bill pinned against the wall of the van. "I must speak out, or burst,' she put her hand to her throat as though she were choking "You beast," she cried furiously, "have I not suffered enough at your hands already?'

"You were always a tigress," growled Merry, shrinking back before her fury, "I married you when you was a slip of a girl — -"

"And a fool a fool!' cried the woman beating her breast, oh, what a fool I was! You know my father was a riding master, and——"

"And how you rode to show off to the pupils?" said Merry with a coarse laugh "I just do It was the riding took me'

'You came as a groom," panted Miss Lorry, fixing him with a steely glare, "and I was idiot enough to admire your good looks I ran away with you, and we were married——"

"I did the straight thing' said Giles "you can't deny that"

"I wish I had died, rather than marry you,' she said savagely "I found myself bound to a brute You struck me—you ill-treated me within a year of our marriage'

Merry lifted a lock of his black hair and showed a scar 'You did that, he said, "you flew at me with a knife"

"I wish I'd killed you," muttered Miss Lorry 'And then you left me. I found out afterwards you had married that farmer's daughter in Wargrove because you got a little money with her Then you left her also, you brute, and with a baby Thank God, I never bore you any children' Ah, and you were in with that bad lot of Hill, and Strode, and Father Don, who was kicked out of the army for cheating at cards You fell lower and lower, and when you found I was making money in the circus you would have forced me to live with you again, but that I learned of your Wargrove marriage It was only my threat of bigamy that kept you away"

"You intended to commit bigamy too, with Lord Saltars," said Merry sullenly, "and I was willing enough to let you But you wrote to Miss Strode saying you'd stop me going to Wargrove——'

"So I could by threatening to prosecute you for bigamy'

Merry shrugged his shoulders "Well, what good would that do?" he asked brutally "I have confessed myself, and now you can do what you like Old Lady Ipson paid me fifteen hundred pounds for stopping your marriage with Saltars, and now it's off I'm going to South Africa,' finished the man

'I'll prosecute you," panted his wife

"No, you won't," he turned and looked at her sharply, "I know a little about you, my lady —— '

Before he could finish his sentence, the name of Miss Lorry was called for her turn She picked up the riding-whip and gave Giles another slash across the eyes, then with a taunting laugh she bounded out of the van Giles, left alone, set his teeth and swore

He was about to leave the caravan, intending to see Miss Lorry no more, and deciding to go away from Shanton next day with his money, for London *en route* to South Africa, when up the steps came Allen Behind him was a veiled lady

"What are you doing here?" demanded Merry, starting back, "get away This place is for the performers '

"And for murderers also," said Allen blocking the way resolutely, in spite of the splendid specimen of physical strength he saw before him. "I know you, Mr. Giles Merry"

"What do you know?" asked Merry, turning pale.

"I know that you shot Strode——"

"It's a lie," said Merry fiercely "I was at the circus——"

"Cain was at the circus He performed in your stead on that night at Westhaven You followed Strode to the Red Deeps where he met my unhappy father, and you shot him The boy Butsey has confessed how he found the blue pocket-book, taken from Strode's body, in your box You took it back, but the boy retained the notes and was traced thereby Butsey is in custody, and you also will be arrested

Merry gasped and sat down heavily "It's a lie I saw Butsey with the pocket-book, and took it from him It was in the book I found the paper which Don showed to your father, I never knew there was any notes I don't know where Butsey stole the book

"He took it from you'

"It's a lie I tell you' cried Merry frantically, and seeing his danger "I was never near the Red Deeps Ask Cain, and he'll tell you I and not he performed He perform my tricks'' said Merry with a sneer, "why he couldn't do them—he hasn't the strength I swear, Mr Hill, by all that's holy I was not at the Red Deeps'

"You were, said the woman behind Allen, and Eva Strode pushed past her lover "Allen and I came to this circus to see Cain and get him to speak about his appearing for you at Westhaven We came round to the back, by permission of Mr Stag When we were passing here, I heard you laugh It was the laugh I heard in my dream—a low, taunting laugh——'

"The dream?' said Merry aghast, "I remember reading what you said at the inquest, Miss Strode, and then my silly wife—the first wife, said Merry, correcting himself, 'talked of it But dreams are all nonsense'

"My dream was not, Giles The body was brought home, and the five knocks were given——"

"By Butsey?' said Merry contemptuously; "bless you, Miss Eva, the boy was hidden on the verge of the common when you and Mr. Allen were walking on the night your father's body was brought home You told Mr Allen your dream."

"Yes, Eva, so you did," said Allen

"Well then, Butsey heard you, and being a little beast as he always is, when he met those three men with the body he came too, and knocked five times as you described to Mr Allen That for dreams," said Merry, snapping his fingers

Eva was slightly disconcerted "That is explained away," she said, "but the laugh I heard in my dream, and heard just now in this caravan, isn't It was you who laughed, Giles, and you who shot my father"

Merry started, and a red spot appeared on his cheek "I wonder if Bell did kill him after all?" he murmured to himself, "she's got a vile temper, and perhaps —"

Allen was about to interrupt him, when there came a cry of dismay from the circus tent, and then a shrill, terrible scream "There's an accident!" cried Merry, bounding past Eva and Allen, "White Robin's done it at last,' and he disappeared

The screams continued, and the noise in the tent Suddenly there was the sound of two shots, and then a roar from the audience A crowd of frightened women and children came pouring out From the back came Stag and Merry and Horace and others carrying the mangled body of Miss Lorry She was insensible and her face was covered with blood

The tears were streaming down Stag's face "I knew that brute would kill her some day," he said "I always warned her—oh, poor Bell! Take her into the van, gentlemen She'll have the finest funeral,—send for a doctor, can't you!"

Eva shrank back in horror at the sight of that marred face The woman opened her eyes, and they rested on the girl A flash of interest came into them and then she fell back uncon-

sciousness. Stag and Merry carried her into the van, but Horace, surrendering his place to another bearer, joined Allen and Miss Strode.

"It was terrible," he said, wiping his face, which was pale and grave, "after you left me to see Cain, Miss Lorry entered on her white stallion. She was not very steady in the saddle—drink, I fancy. Still she put the horse through some of his tricks all right. But he seemed to be out of temper, and reared. She began to strike him furiously with her whip, and quite lost her self-control. He grew more savage and dashed her against the pole of the tent. How it happened I can't say, but in a moment he was off and on the ground, with the horse savaging her. Oh, the screams," said Horace biting his lips, "poor woman! I had my Derringer in my pocket and almost without thinking I leaped into the ring and ran up to put a couple of bullets through the brute's head. White Robin is dead, and poor Miss Lorry soon will be,' and he wiped his face again.

Allen and Eva heard this recital horror-struck, and then a medical man pushed past them. He was followed by a handsome boy in a red jersey. "Cain—Cain,' cried Eva, but he merely turned for a moment and then disappeared into the van. Merry came out almost immediately, still in his stage dress and looking ashy white.

"She's done for," he whispered to Allen, "she can't live another hour, the doctor says. I'll change, and come back. Miss Eva,' he added, turning to the horror-struck girl, "you want to know who laughed in the van? It was Miss Lorry!'

"Your wife?" said Eva, with pale lips, "then she—"

"If you believe in that dream of yours, she did,' said Merry, and moved away before Allen could stop him. Cain appeared at the top of the van steps.

"Miss Eva?" he said, "she says you, and she wants you."

"No, no!" said Allen, holding the girl back.

"I must," said Eva, breaking away, "you come too, Allen. I must learn the truth. If Miss Lorry laughed"—she paused and looked round, "oh, say, dream—my dream!" she said, and ran up the steps.

Miss Lorry was lying on the floor, with her head supported by a cushion. Her face was pale and streaked with blood, but her eyes were calm, and filled with recognition of Eva. The doctor, kneeling beside the dying woman, was giving her some brandy, and Cain, in his red jersey, with a small Bible in his hand, waited near the door. Allen and Horace, with their hats off, stood behind him.

"I'm glad," said Miss Lorry, gasping, "I want to speak. Don't you let Saltars—marry you," she brought out the words with great force, and her head fell back.

"You mustn't talk," said the doctor faintly.

"Am I dying?" she asked, opening her splendid eyes.

The doctor nodded, and Cain came forward with the tears streaming down his face. "Oh, let me speak, dear Miss Lorry," he said, "let me pray—"

"No," said the woman faintly. "I must talk to Miss Eva. I have much to say. Come and kneel down beside me, dear."

Eva did so, and took Miss Lorry's hand. The dying woman smiled. "I'm glad to have you by me, when I pass," she said, "Mr. Hill, White Robin—he didn't mean to. I was not well. I should not have struck him."

"He's dead," said the deep voice of the American, "I shot him."

"Shot him!" said Miss Lorry, suddenly raising herself, "shot who? not Strode. It was I—it was I who—"

"Miss Lorry—let me pray," cried Cain vehemently, "make your peace with our dear, forgiving Master."

"You're a good boy, Cain. You should have been my son. But I

must confess my sins before I ask forgiveness Mr Hill, have you paper and a pencil?—ah, give me some brandy——"

While the doctor did so, Horace produced a stylographic pen, and a sheet of paper torn from his pocket-book He passed these to Allen, who also came and knelt by Miss Lorry He quite understood that the miserable creature was about to confess her crime Stag appeared at the door, but did not venture further Cain saw him and pushed him back 'Let her die in peace,' he said, and took Stag away

"Do you want us to remain?" said the doctor gently

"Yes I want to tell every one what I did Mr Hill, write it down I hope to live to sign it

"I am ready," said Allen placing the paper, and poising the pen

Miss Lorry had some more brandy A light came into her eyes, and her voice also became stronger

"Hold my hand" she said to Eva "If you keep holding it, I'll know you forgive me I—I shot your father"

"You but why?" asked Eva, aghast

"Don't take away your hand—don't Forgive me I was mad I knew your father many years ago He was cruel to me Giles would have been a better husband but for your father When Strode I can call him Strode, can I? when he came back from South Africa, he came to the circus, when we were near London He found out my address from Giles, with whom he had much to do, and not always doing the best things either Strode said he wanted to marry you to Saltars, and he heard that Saltars wanted to marry me He told me that he would stop the marriage, by revealing that I was Giles's wife—ah!——"

Another sip of brandy gave her strength to go on, and Allen set down all she said "I was furious I wanted to be Lady Saltars, besides, I loved him I always loved him I had such a cruel life with Giles—I was so weary of riding—I thought I might die poor I have saved money—but not so much as I said I told Saltars I had five hundred a year but I have only two hundred pounds altogether When that was gone, I thought I might starve If my beauty went—if I met with an accident—no, I could not face poverty Besides, I loved Saltars, I really loved him I implored your father to hold his tongue Giles could say nothing, as I could stop him by threatening to prosecute him for bigamy Only your father knew——"

Again she had to gasp for breath, and then went on rapidly as though she feared she would not last till she had told all "Your father behaved like a brute I hated him When he came that night to Westhaven, I heard from Butsey of his arrival, and that he had gone to the Red Deeps How Butsey knew, I can't say But I was not on in the hills till very late at the very end of the programme I had a good, quick horse, and saddled it myself—I took a pistol—I intended to shoot your father, and close his mouth for ever It was his own fault—how could I lose Saltars, and face poverty and—disgrace?"

There was another pause while Allen's pen set down what she said, and then with an effort she continued "I went to the Red Deeps and waited behind some trees It was close on nine I saw your father waiting by the spring It was a kind of twilight, and, hidden by the bushes, I was really quite near to him He was waiting for some one At first I thought I would speak to him again, and implore his pity, but I knew he would do nothing—I knew also he was going to Wargrove, and would tell Mrs Merry that I was her husband's wife I waited my chance to fire I had tethered the horse some distance away. As I looked there came a shot which evidently hit

Strode on the arm, for he put his hand up and wheeled round I never stopped to think that some one was trying to kill him also, or I should have let the work be done by that person"

"Did you know who the person was?"

"No, I did not see," said Miss Lorry faintly "I had no eyes save for Strode Oh, how I hated him!" a gleam of anger passed over her white face "When he wheeled to face the other person who shot, I saw that his breast was turned fairly towards me I shot him through the heart I was a good shot," added Miss Lorry proudly, "for I earned my living in the circus at one time by shooting as the female cowboy the incongruity of the phrase did not seem to strike her as grotesque "I heard some one running away, but I did not mind I sprang out of the bush and searched his pockets I thought he might have set down something about my marriage in his papers I took the blue pocket-book and then rode back quickly to West haven, where I arrived in time for my turn That's all Let me sign it"

She did so painfully, and then Allen and Horace appended their names as witnesses

"How came the pocket book into Merry's possession?" It was Allen who asked, and Miss Lorry replied drowsily--

"Butsey stole the pocket book from my rooms He saw the notes which I left in it and when I was out he found where I kept it I believe Merry took it from him, and then--oh, how weary I am!——"

The doctor made a sign, and Allen, putting the confession into his pocket, moved away with Horace Eva bent down and kissed the dying woman "I forgive you," she said, "indeed I forgive you. You acted under a sudden impulse and——"

"Thank God you forgive me," said Miss Lorry

Eva would have spoken but that Cain drew her back "Ask our Lord and Master to forgive you!" he said in piercing tones "Oh, pray, Miss Lorry--pray for forgiveness!"

"I have been too great a sinner"

"The greatest sinner may return, only ask Him to forgive!"

Eva could bear the sight no longer, she walked quickly out of the tent and almost fainted in Allen's arms as she came down the steps And within they heard the dying woman falteringly repeating the Lord's prayer as Cain spoke it

"'Forgive us our tres-passes as we forgive those who --'

Then the weaker voice died away, and only the clear tones of the lad could be heard finishing the sublime petition

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WEDDING OF THE SPLIN

A year after the death of Miss Lorry, two ladies sat in Mrs Palmer's drawing room One was the widow herself, looking as pretty and as common as ever, although she now dressed in more subdued tints, thanks to her companion's frequent admonitions Eva was near her, with a bright and expectant look on her face, as though she anticipated the arrival of some one It was many months since Allen had gone out to Bolivia, and this day he was expected back with Mr Horace Parkins Before he departed again for South America, a ceremony would take place to convert Eva Strode into Mrs Hill

"I'm sure I don't know what I shall do without you, Eva dear," said the widow for the tenth time that day

"Oh, you'll have Mr Parkins to console you, Constance"

"Mr Parkins, indeed!" said Mrs Palmer tossing her head. She and

Eva were both in evening-dress, and were waiting for the guests Allen was coming, also his mother and Mr Parkins "I don't know why you should say that, dear"

Eva laughed "I have seen a number of letters with the Bolivian stamp on them, Constance——"

"Addressed to you I should think so But something better than letters is coming this evening, Eva"

"Don't try to get out of the position," said Miss Strode, slipping her arm round the waist of the widow, "you created it yourself Besides, Allen told me in his letter that Mr Parkins talked of no one and nothing but you And think, dear, you won't have to alter your initials, Constance Parkins sounds just as well as Constance Palmer'

Better, I think I don't deny that I like Mr Parkins'

"Call him Horace——"

'He hasn't given me the right You forget I saw him only for a month or so, when he was home last"

You saw him long enough to fall in love with him"

'I don't deny that -to you, but if he dares to ask me to be his wife, I'll tell him what I think

Quite so, and then we can be married on the same day I to Allen, and you to Horace Parkins Remember Horace is rich now—the mine has turned out splendidly"

"I'm rich enough without that,' said Mrs Palmer with a fine colour, "if I marry it will be to please myself I have had quite enough of marrying for money, and much good it's done me"

"You have done every one good," said Eva, kissing her, "think how kind you were to me, throughout that terrible time when——"

"Hark!" said Mrs Palmer, raising a jewelled finger, "at last!"

Shortly the door opened and Mrs [illegible] entered, followed by Allen and [illegible] and by Mr M[illegible] had seen A[illegible] hur[illegible]

but both ladies were astonished when they saw the lawyer. "Well, this is a surprise," said the widow, giving her hand

"I thought I would come, as this is Allen's welcome home," said Mr Mask, "you don't mind?"

"I am delighted"

"And you, Miss Strode?"

"I am pleased too I look on you as one of my best friends," said Eva, who did not forget that she owed Mrs Palmer's protection to the lawyer's kindness "Mrs Hill, how are you?"

"I think you can call me mother now," said the old lady as she greeted her son's promised wife with a kiss

"Oh!" said Allen, who looked bronzed and very fit, "I think, mother, you are usurping my privilege"

'Why should it be a privilege?' said Horace, casting looks at the widow, 'why not make it a universal custom?'

"In that case I should——" began Mrs Palmer

"No, you shouldn't," said Horace, "the world wouldn't let you'

"Let me what? You don't know what I was about to say"

Horace would have responded, but the gong thundered

"You were about to say that you hoped we were hungry," said Mask slyly, "that is what a hostess usually says"

"That," said Mrs Palmer in her turn, "is a hint Mr Hill, will you take in Eva?—Mr Mask——"

"I offer my arm to Mrs Hill," said the old lawyer

"In that case," said the widow, smiling, and with a look at the big American, "I must content myself with you"

Horace said something which made her smile and blush, and then they all went in to a dainty meal, which every one enjoyed. After the terrible experiences of a year ago, each person seemed bent upon enjoyment, and the meal was a very bright one. When it was ended, the gentlemen did not sit over their wine, but joined the

ladies almost immediately. Mrs Palmer and Mrs Hill were in the drawing-room talking in low tones, but Eva was nowhere to be seen. Allen looked around, and Mrs Palmer laughed at the sight of his anxious face. "You'll find her in the garden," she said, "it's quite a perfect night of the Indian summer, therefore."

Allen did not wait for further information. He departed at once and by the quickest way, directly through the French window, which happened to be open. A few steps along the terrace under a full moon, showed him Eva walking on the lawn. At once he sprang down the steps. "Don't walk on the grass, you foolish child," he said, taking her arm, "you'll get your feet damp."

"It's too delicious a night for that," said Eva lifting her lovely face to the silver moon, "but we can sit in the arbour."

"Don't you think Parkins will want that? He's bound to come out with Mrs Palmer, and then—"

"Does he really mean to propose?"

"He's been talking of nothing else for the last few months, and has come home for that precise purpose. But for that, he would have remained with Mark at the mine. Poor Mark has all the work, and we have all the fun. But I was determined to come to you and make sure that you didn't marry Saltars after all."

"Poor Saltars," said Eva, sighing, "he did come and ask me, but his heart was not in the proposal. That terrible grandmother of mine urged him to the breach. He seemed quite glad when I declined."

"What bad taste," said Allen laughing.

"I think he really loved that poor woman who died," said Eva in low tones, "and she certainly loved him, when she committed so daring a crime for his sake."

"It might have been ambition as well as love, Eva, and it certainly was a fear of starvation in her old age. Miss Lorry wanted to [illegible] herself safe for a happy time, and so, when she found your father was likely to rob her of an expected heaven, she shot him."

"I wish the truth had not been made public, though," said Eva.

"My dear, it was necessary, so as to remove all blame from any one who may have been suspected. Poor Stig, however, was not able to give Miss Lorry the splendid funeral he wished to give, out of respect. As you know, she was buried very quietly. Only Horace and I and Saltars followed her to her grave."

"Did her husband?"

"Giles Merry? No, he never came back, even to see her die. The man was a brute always. He went on to Africa, I believe, with the money he borrowed—that's a polite way of putting it from old Lady Ipson. I suppose Mrs Merry was glad when she heard he was out of the country."

Eva nodded. "And yet I think if he had come back, she would have forgiven him. Even since she knew he was not her husband, she seemed to lose her fear of him. She still called herself Mrs Merry to Cain's wife. No one knows the truth, save you and I and Lady Ipson."

"Well, it's best to let things remain as they are. I trust Mrs Merry is more cheerful?"

"Oh, yes—the fact is, Cain has converted her."

"Oh, has Cain taken up his residence in Misery Castle?"

Eva laughed. "It is called the House Beautiful now," she said. "Cain got the name out of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he lives there with his mother and his wife."

"What, did he marry Jane Wasp after all?"

"He did, some months after you left. Wasp was very much against the match, as he called Cain a vagabond."

"Warkins, I recollect know," said Eva tossing her head. "After he [illegible]